United Nations A/S-27/PV.4

General Assembly
Twenty-seventh special session

Official Records

4th meeting
Thursday, 9 May 2002, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda items 8 and 9 (continued)

Review of the achievements in the implementation and results of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s

Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade

Draft resolution (A/S-27/L.1)

The President: The Assembly will first hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Janez Drnovšek, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia.

Mr. Drnovšek (Slovenia): First of all I would like to express my appreciation and support to the United Nations and to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for organizing this important event. A meeting of children and non-governmental and governmental representatives from all over the world means an opportunity to assess what has been achieved in the decade since the World Summit for Children. At the same time it also represents an opportunity for us, together, to commit ourselves to achieving the goals that will ensure a better life for all children.

All too many children lack the conditions for survival, growth and personal development. Such children are to be found all over the world, and their situation demands special attention. A better life needs to be secured not only for children in developing countries, who, like the society around them, are struggling against poverty and its attendant phenomena. We must also improve the position of those children who, although they live in the developed world, are deprived of the well-being otherwise enjoyed in their societies, because they have been marginalized. We can only achieve these goals in partnership and solidarity, both within countries and between them.

Slovenia is founding its development on the recognition of the importance of social solidarity, embodied in a welfare State, to ensure equal opportunities for children. We acknowledge the importance of investing in children's development, and so we provide education and primary health care free of charge. Furthermore, we ensure the social and economic security of children through various forms of social assistance. We are especially proud of the fact that we provide one year of paid maternity and parental leave in order to give a child a good start in life. For a number of years we have been increasing the share of national wealth allocated to children so as to ensure for all children the opportunity to develop and realize their potential.

But despite efforts systematically to ensure equal opportunities for all children, some groups remain on the margins. Non-governmental organizations and civil society as a whole must play an important role in preventing the social exclusion of those children. We

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are increasingly seeking ways of resolving these problems in cooperation with them. We firmly believe that the comprehensive implementation of children's rights requires the cooperation of all elements of society. The development of a partnership for "A world fit for children" is therefore one of the key tasks facing us all.

What applies to partnership and solidarity within societies applies equally to partnership and solidarity among the international community. Poor countries will be able to escape the vicious circle of poverty only through an investment in the comprehensive development of children. This will without a doubt require development aid from the more advanced countries and from international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other specialized United Nations agencies have an important role to play in the realization of these goals. The UNICEF committee operating in Slovenia is successfully promoting the values of international solidarity. This is reflected in the fact that the per capita contribution made through the national committee by Slovenian individuals and companies to UNICEF aid programmes for children worldwide is among the highest in the world.

Children who have been affected by armed conflict need special help and solidarity. If appropriate help is not given them, the consequences will be felt by all of humanity — something that the international community cannot allow. Through specific projects, Slovenia is endeavouring to help those children in South-eastern Europe who have been affected by the conflicts of the last 10 years. It has established an International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance, whose activities over a four-year period have made it the leading mine-clearance agency in South-eastern Europe. An equally important part of its programme of activities consists of rehabilitation assistance to mine victims, and it has provided treatment to a large number of children.

No country can achieve long-term stability and prosperity if it does not ensure its children an opportunity for survival, growth and personal development. In an age of increasing global interdependence, failure to ensure fundamental rights and developmental opportunities for children in one country can have a negative impact not only on the development of that country but also on the stability of other parts of the world. This is another reason why it is important that, by joining forces and taking into consideration children's opinions, we commit ourselves to the full implementation of children's rights and to the building of "A world fit for children".

Let us join together and move forward in partnership and hope in order to achieve a world that is worthy of its children.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Nagoum Yamassoum, Prime Minister of the Republic of Chad.

Mr. Yamassoum (Chad) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to convey to you, Sir, greetings from the President of the Republic of Chad, Mr. Idriss Deby, as well as the congratulations of the Government and the people of Chad. I should like also to express the hope that this world summit will lead to decisions that will have a positive impact on the lives of children the world over.

First of all, I should like to congratulate the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the very particular interest he attaches to the resolution of global issues and of the problems of children; this session is clear evidence of that interest.

I should like also to recall that the situation of children before the adoption of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the holding of the 1990 World Summit for Children was a source of tremendous concern. It would be an understatement to say that three quarters of the world's children were not being treated as they should have been. Already existing problems — disease, malnutrition, lack of education and child labour — have been compounded by even more unacceptable ones such as child prostitution, the recruitment of children in armies and trafficking in children, among others.

But if we ask ourselves if children are really treated better today than they were yesterday, and the answer is no, then what should we do, as parents and as decision-makers, to ensure that children throughout the world live better and suffer less?

For its part, and despite three decades of political upheaval and difficulties linked to structural adjustment, my country, Chad, has undertaken efforts to improve the living conditions of children.

In the legal sphere, Chad has ratified the principal instruments relating to the rights of the child, namely the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 20 November 1989; the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour; and ILO Convention 138 concerning Minimum Age of Admission to Employment, of 26 June 1973.

Furthermore, Chad, which fully endorses the common African position adopted at the Cairo Pan-African Forum on the Future of Children, held in May 2001, has just acceded to the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict on the one hand, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography on the other.

Indeed, the first Protocol is reflected in my Government's unequivocal declaration that the minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces is 18. Therefore I must categorically reject the allegations made by certain non-governmental organizations or associations regarding the forced recruitment of children into our army.

The establishment of this legal arsenal was accompanied by other actions on the part of the various ministerial departments involved in the problems of children. The most important actions included the elaboration and adoption, in 1993 and 1995, respectively, of a national programme of action for the children of Chad that is based on five elements: health care and nutrition; water; sanitation and the environment; basic education; and the provision of care for infants and for children in particularly difficult circumstances.

Furthermore, the creation of the Children's Parliament and the "yes" vote for the children of Chad — which focuses on the combat against HIV/AIDS, the education of children, the fight against poverty, the protection of children in time of war, and on putting an end to the exploitation and abuse of children — express the Government's determination to give a high priority to the protection of children, who represent the future of our country.

To do this, the country has established a solid and fruitful partnership with civil society. That partnership has been reflected in the creation of a multi-sectoral team incorporating the ministries concerned and the network of associations working for children through the implementation of the programme on the integral Development of the Young Children of Chad. It has been reflected also, in the establishment of an ongoing dialogue with children through their parliament and through the network of student ambassadors for peace.

The Government is determined henceforth to involve children in its cooperation programmes, in particular those carried out jointly with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). I should like here to pay tribute to the outstanding work done by UNICEF, whose tireless support has made it possible for us to make progress in the protection of mothers and children.

Along those same lines, I should like also to pay tribute to the Republic of China on Taiwan for its exemplary support in our campaign for children.

Furthermore, in the area of health, several programmes have been implemented in the past decade to combat childhood diseases, primarily polio. The implementation of a national strategy for health, established in 2001, will make it possible to reduce the infant mortality rate and to bring the vaccination rate up to 60 per cent. Furthermore, our country has acceded to the Bamako initiative, which has allowed us to develop the necessary strategies to increase and improve the accessibility of health services and essential medicine to women and children, the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Finally, a law on health and reproduction adopted in March 2002 strengthens the instruments for protecting women and children.

Concurrently, specific action has been undertaken to improve and increase capacity in education facilities, including through support for community schools. This has allowed us to obtain a few encouraging results. I cite, for instance, the rate of enrolment, which rose from 46.1 per cent to 62 per cent for boys and from 29 per cent to 57 per cent for girls between 1993 to 2000.

These few examples exemplify the efforts of the Government, which is determined to provide harmonious development to the children of Chad, in accordance with its international and national commitments. That is why it recommends that this session adopt a special resolution on socialization and solidarity, along with a programme for children and families of countries in difficult situations. Similarly, it

undertakes before this Assembly to maintain the commitments made in the document for the defence of the fundamental rights of children.

In conclusion, I call on Chad's partners to pay special attention to the efforts of its Government and mobilized communities and to its initiatives for peace, development and the success of this global action on behalf of children. I wish this special session every success.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency The Right Honourable Sher Bahadur Deuba, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Nepal.

Mr. Deuba (Nepal): In 1990, 12 years ago, the international community launched a historic campaign to inspire hope and to ensure better conditions for children around the world. The campaign has heightened our collective consciousness and stirred us to redouble our efforts in this respect. Much progress has been made ever since, but so much more remains to be done.

There are still 150 million malnourished and 120 million unschooled children in the world. Eleven million still die every year before the age of five. While old problems persist, new ones, such as HIV/AIDS, are taking their toll on children. Quite often, abuse at home and violence in conflict situations victimize children and traumatize them for life. Leaving children in such a predicament is morally unacceptable to all of us.

Children must be protected in war and in peace. Nepal is committed to doing everything in its power to promote child development and to protect child rights so that our children can rise to their full potential. We were one of the very first countries to join the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to sign its two Optional Protocols. We have also adopted regional instruments under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation to enhance child welfare and to prevent trafficking in children, besides declaring this the Decade for the Rights of the Child.

Steps are under way to implement these commitments. We have adopted a children's act and other laws to ensure child welfare and to ban child labour. A separate ministry for women and children coordinates activities preserving child rights and executing the national action plan for child development. Children receive free public education, immunization and primary health care, and primary-level girl students are entitled to free textbooks, while those from remote areas receive scholarships as well. Special schools have been set up to address the needs of disabled children. The national human rights commission monitors the human rights situation and special benches in courts decide juvenile cases.

These measures have had a palpable impact on children's conditions in the country. School enrolment and immunization have increased and infant mortality has declined; nearly 100,000 girls have benefited from the scholarship programme. But sustaining and expanding these measures is a daunting challenge for Nepal, a least developed country where the per capita income is barely $220, 38 per cent of the people live in absolute poverty and 50 per cent of the population are under the age of 18. The paucity of public resources and the poverty of families prevent adequate investment in children. Non-governmental organizations, most of which are doing a laudable job, are also faced with constraints in their capacities and coverage.

To make matters worse, the Maoist terrorists, seeking to destroy our fledgling democracy and freedoms, have been devastating our children and our country. They abduct and abuse children and forcibly recruit them as fighters. They murder young children and their parents who refuse to yield to their extortion. They bomb schools, health posts and bridges. The Government is compelled to respond to these Maoist atrocities.

At a time when we are fighting a war on poverty with all our resources and energy, we have been confronted with the war on terror. These put a severe strain on our resources, but we will have to win both wars if Nepal is to achieve a durable peace, better opportunities for its children and improved standards of living for its people.

Thanks to the moral support of our friends and the admirable performance of our security forces, we are making headway against the Maoists. Much of the terror infrastructure has been destroyed. We are determined to defeat the Maoists and we can do so with assistance from our friends to better equip our forces. However, we prefer dialogue to resolve the problem and are prepared for it. Once betrayed, we want to

make sure that the Maoists renounce violence and lay down their arms before the fresh talks begin.

However, to protect democracy and freedoms, to deter extremists from exploiting people's vulnerabilities again and to give people hope and opportunities, Nepal must win the war on poverty and speed up sustainable development. This will not be possible, however, without longer-term and sustained partnerships with our development partners, particularly from the North, which should provide us with increased development assistance and deeper debt relief to complement our resources, and improved market access for our products and services.

Needless to say, for so many developing countries, particularly the least developed ones, poverty is the main obstacle to improving the state of children, promoting peace and securing sustainable development. While these nations will have to do their best to put their houses in order, the international community must come to their help.

In an era of globalization humanity has become indivisible and must be treated as such. The Millennium Declaration offers a blueprint for a better world, a world that is also fit for children. We must take the historic opportunity provided by the special session to recommit ourselves to doing our best in order to give children a better space in which to blossom. We should not let our children down.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Vicente Fox, President of the United Mexican States.

President Fox (*spoke in Spanish*): Slightly more than 10 years ago, Mexico promoted the World Summit for Children. Since then, the world has undergone profound changes. Globalization has posed complex challenges to nations. At the same time, it represents an opportunity that we must use to improve the condition of children.

In response to these challenges, as political leaders and citizens of the twenty-first century, we must create formulas that will enable us to overcome poverty, fully respecting the freedom and the dignity of human beings and the protection of their rights.

There is no question that the best investment that countries can make to advocate truly sustained and sustainable development is to guarantee equal opportunities for girls and boys, and to guarantee their security from conception throughout their entire lives. The future of our countries depends not only on equality of opportunity and on such guarantees, but also on continuously expanding the capacities of our boys and girls. By meeting their basic needs and expanding their spaces for freedom, we are creating conditions in which to form responsible adults and better citizens.

Mexico has come to this world forum with very good results to report. Of the 26 goals pertaining to Mexico that were adopted at the 1990 World Summit, Mexico has fully achieved 20. The progress made towards achieving another of the goals has been satisfactory, and we are still evaluating the others. Only in the area of maternal mortality were goals not reached. Although the results are significant, in Mexico, as in other nations, there is still much to be done. The pending issues are diverse, although poverty is unquestionably the main obstacle to be overcome, as is violence, since millions of boys and girls throughout the world find themselves trapped in that situation.

Mexico has made progress in its economic, political and demographic transition. The challenge is to advance our social transition even more, with a view to building a more just, inclusive and equitable society within a framework of joint responsibility for all. To face these challenges, we are basing our work on a philosophy we call Contigo — together — which results in four lines of action: capacity-building; the expansion of productive opportunities; the accumulation of assets; and the strengthening of social protection networks.

We have started prenatal and post-partum care activities. We have focused on providing food supplements to ward off malnutrition; advocating early education with the active participation of parents; and ensuring equality through a system of free public education and grants to ensure that youths and children remain in school. This year there have been more than 5 million grants, including at the university level.

Childcare is a social imperative. Thus, in Mexico, as in other countries, we already have a law for the protection of the rights of girls, boys and adolescents. We are also making progress in consolidating the National Council for Children and Adolescents, in order to provide a governing body for all policies on children.

I urge Members to guarantee universal access to education and ongoing enrolment in schools by offering quality educational services.

Let us strengthen our health systems decisively to face the challenges in this area. Let us confront addiction and drug use, which endanger the development opportunities of children and adolescents and which harm families and the social fabric of their communities.

Let us protect children from violence and physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Let us prevent girls and boys from becoming the targets of economic exploitation or the victims of armed conflict or of human trafficking.

Let us recognize, as the great poet Gabriela Mistral said, that we are guilty of many errors and many omissions. But our worst crime is the abandonment of girls and boys. Many of the things that we need can wait. Children cannot: children are Today. We must start taking care of them today.

The President: I call on Mr. Elchin Efendiyev, Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Efendiyev (Azerbaijan) (*spoke in Russian*): I am very honoured to represent a young, independent State, the Republic of Azerbaijan, a country whose overall strategy is to create the conditions needed to take advantage of opportunities for the full development of all citizens, with priority support for the population's vulnerable groups, first and foremost children.

The problems facing children, in all their diversity, are one of the State's highest priorities and it receives the special attention of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Heydar Aliyev.

In evaluating the decade since the World Summit for Children, I would like to mention a number of our national accomplishments. Foremost among them is our accession to international agreements of utmost importance concerning the rights and status of children: the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols; the European Convention on the Legal Status of Children Born out of Wedlock; International Labour Organization Convention 138; the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules); and others.

Another achievement is the State policy to strengthen gender parity in society, to ensure equal access to education, to reduce epidemic diseases and fully to eliminate polio, to work in the field of reproductive health and family planning and to promote physical education and sports. It should also be mentioned that Azerbaijan is a leading sponsor of resolutions on the release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts (see E/CN.6/2002/L.1/Rev.1), which have been adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its past eight sessions.

Azerbaijan, like other Member States, prepared for the special session within the framework of the Global Movement for Children. Our country has made a financial contribution, to the extent it was able, to the conduct of this session, and has taken an active part in the work of the Preparatory Committee.

In order to evaluate the outcome of our work, to make comparative assessments with results in other countries and to plan our activities effectively, the Republic of Azerbaijan has joined the international system to monitor progress in the improvement of the conditions of children. However, the effectiveness of the work conducted in the country has been reduced as a result of the difficulties that the process of profound social and economic transformation have brought. The military aggression by Armenia and occupation of 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan resulted in a million refugees and internally displaced persons, 250,000 of whom are children; this has caused tremendous material and incalculable moral damage. Thousands of children became orphans and were disabled, and hundreds were killed. Scores were taken hostage or are still missing. Hundreds of schools, kindergartens, childcare centres, boarding schools for orphans and other medical and cultural institutions were completely destroyed. Mines have been laid on thousands of square kilometres of land, which instead of bringing life now brings death.

Efforts by the international community to settle the conflict in and around the Nagorny-Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the liberation of the occupied Azerbaijani territories, in particular through the implementation of Security Council resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993), unfortunately remain ineffective.

At present, hundreds of thousands of children enduring the severest of physical and psychological traumas are living in tent-filled camps, railroad cars, dug-outs and other temporary shelters for refugees and displaced persons.

Our delegation is certain that one of the main issues requiring greater attention at this session is the protection of the rights of children in armed conflict. We welcome and support the activities of Mr. Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. We invite him to visit Azerbaijan and to become acquainted with the situation on the ground.

During the conflict, the Republic of Azerbaijan adopted more than 100 State-level documents aimed at solving the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons. Our efforts have received considerable assistance from international humanitarian organizations, a number of countries and private individuals. In that connection, I would particularly like to hail the activities of UNICEF in Azerbaijan and the valuable support of the Executive Director of the Fund, Ms. Carol Bellamy, in terms of operational assistance and constructive cooperation for children.

At the same time, I cannot fail to mention that the total volume of humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijan provided by international organizations and donor countries has significantly decreased. This further aggravates the terrible plight of refugees and internally displaced persons. We call upon donor countries and international governmental and non-governmental organizations to continue to provide humanitarian assistance to disabled children, orphans, children from poor families and children who have become victims of armed conflict.

Being in a situation of neither war nor peace as a consequence of the unresolved armed conflict, and experiencing all the burdens of military aggression and occupation, the Republic of Azerbaijan is sincerely interested in the establishment of a comprehensive peace in the region. We participated actively in the preparation of the draft final outcome document of the special session "A world fit for children", and we support its fundamental provisions as a basis for formulating strategies and policies for the sake of children in the coming decade.

I would like to assure the Assembly that the Republic of Azerbaijan remains committed to following the path it has chosen and to maintaining its course towards the creation and improvement of a world fit for children as a necessary condition for establishing a prosperous society of free and honourable citizens.

The President: I call next on His Excellency Mr. Louis Michel, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium.

Mr. Michel (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium had enthusiastically prepared, while it held the presidency of the European Union, for the special session that was to have been held last September. The tragic events of 11 September and the perspective we have gained since that time lend a particular depth to this session. We are even more aware of our strong responsibility to future generations. The tasks that we must take up in preparing for the future are huge. If we fail to face this responsibility for the future head on, we shall be seriously guilty of a lack of vision.

In adopting the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for implementing the Declaration, on 30 September 1990, the 71 heads of State or Government and all other high-level representatives proclaimed, in paragraph 25 of the Declaration: "There can be no task nobler than giving every child a better future" (A/45/625, annex). We are now meeting in this Assembly, 12 years after that extraordinary Summit for Children of 1990, which rallied around the cause of children a global political will of a magnitude and ambition that have never been equalled.

Between wishful eloquence and reality, have we truly acted on that ambitious commitment? Have we responded to the 27 specific goals linked to the survival, health, nutrition, education, protection and human development of children? Do we understand the higher interests of children in all circumstances, in times of peace as well as in times of war? Have we integrated their specific realities into our activities, such as their well-being or their distress, and the economic, cultural and human context?

Much progress has been made, but the forceful images of this past decade continue to mar our memories. In the past 10 years, forced into monstrous conflicts, children have become the victims of bullets. I need only recall that every month, 600 to 800 children

are still killed or wounded by anti-personnel landmines, and that more than 300,000 child soldiers have been delivered up to the horrors of war in more than 30 countries of the world.

Since the Summit and the end of the cold war, the world, unfortunately, has been faced with ethnic conflicts and civil wars of unprecedented intensity, in which children have become targets, or what has been called coyly, if not cynically, "collateral victims".

Since the Summit, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has created millions of orphans. The devastation caused by that disease is already compromising achievements in the fight against other ills. The issue of the survival and the development of children, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, is an agonizing concern. The world is faced with the chronic poverty of 3 billion individuals, half of whom are children. The inequalities are inexorably reproduced and repeated.

The industrialized countries are not spared real scourges such as violence, drugs, traffic deaths, all types of exclusion such as the unacceptable exponential gap in access to knowledge and expertise, and threats to the environment. Reflection, collective action, volunteerism and commitment must guide and give fresh impetus to humanistic action and political responsibility.

Can we be satisfied with our performance over the past 10 years? Are we determined at the dawn of the new millennium to do everything possible to turn promises into reality? I am not here to uselessly darken the picture. The World Summit for Children, which coincided in 1990 with the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, marked a very important and ambitious phase in improving the well-being of the children of the world. The Summit firmly indicated the course to be taken. The Convention on the Rights of the Child in itself constituted one of the most remarkable achievements of the past decade in the realization of the rights of the child throughout the world.

A decade is a short period from the historical perspective, but considerable progress has been made in just a few years. Innovations considered revolutionary 50 years ago have been decided on and often implemented. Such was the case with the adoption in June 1999 by the General Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) of its Convention 182, on the worst forms of child labour, and, more recently, with the Optional Protocols of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

These new normative texts refer to areas where children's rights are being brutally and deliberately violated, leaving ineradicable scars on their bodies, minds and spirits and in the most intimate places of their individual worlds. They are aimed at putting an end to the indignity of child soldiers, where we see adults using children to wage wars in their place, mixing cynicism with cowardice. They are aimed also at abolishing despicable practices such as sexual exploitation, which is all too common.

Belgium, which attaches the greatest importance to these new instruments of international law, recently ratified ILO Convention 182 and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We call on all States to sign, ratify and implement as soon as possible these essential legal instruments for the protection of children. Moreover, Belgium favours amending the Convention on the Rights of the Child in order to strengthen the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Just over a year ago, 150 heads of State or Government, meeting on the occasion of the Millennium Summit, adopted promising and specific goals on access to education; reducing infant and maternal mortality; the fight against transmissible diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS; assistance to HIV/AIDS orphans; sustainable development; and the protection of the rights of the child.

At the close of this special session of the General Assembly we will adopt a solemn declaration, centred on an ambitious and visionary plan of action. We must reaffirm vigorously our determination to master the rules of globalization and to put children first, so that it will be an opportunity, not a disaster.

What, then, are the priorities for our future action? Above all, the Convention on the Rights of the Child must inspire and guide our action. It remains an instrument of reference, the essential legal basis for recognition of the rights of the child. Belgium has embodied the substance and principles of this instrument in its Constitution. Since March 2000, every child has the constitutional right to respect for his or her moral, physical, psychological and sexual integrity.

During its presidency of the European Union, Belgium organized a meeting of ministers responsible for children, which laid the foundation for a crosscutting approach on the rights of the child and set up an informal network for dialogue and for exchanges of information, statistics and methodology. We also believe that it would be useful to remind the world, once a year, of the importance of the Convention by celebrating an International Day of the Rights of the Child on 20 November.

The primacy of the rights of the child laid down in the Convention must also be reflected in the final document of this session. It is most important that countries that undertook a commitment to children in 1990 recommit themselves in the same way to implement it, and that those that have not yet ratified the Convention do so. This is part of the broader process of strengthening international law, which constitutes the main focus of building a better world.

Our solemn commitment can be summed up in three words: invest, protect and listen. We, as heads of State or Government and as ministers responsible for the rights of children at home and around the world, commit ourselves first to invest in a policy for our children. It has been proven that investing in primary education, especially for girls, is the most effective decision that a society can make. We must reduce the marginalization of underprivileged children who are faced with unequal opportunities. The right to education is an essential element of any policy in support of human rights.

It is also through the education of children that we are able to fight racism and xenophobia. We must appeal to Member States to implement as soon as possible the Programme of Action of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, adopted at Durban.

We are also determined to protect children from the terrible consequences of conflicts, the horror of cruelty against them, violence, anti-personnel mines, discrimination in all its forms, exploitation, forced recruitment into armed forces and the AIDS epidemic, which affects them in a particularly cruel way. Too many children in the world are driven to prostitution, often as a result of poverty and always as a result of adults making use of them. The Yokohama Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children opened up the way to new progress. We welcome this and are encouraged by it. We also wish to actively encourage all societies in all countries to abolish child labour in general and its worst forms in particular.

A rigorous assessment of the situation of children and the implementation of texts concerning them requires the establishment of independent national institutions. Belgium has had mediators for children for many years. We can attest to the importance and the effectiveness of the mission performed by these mediators. My country therefore encourages all States to create their own similar independent institutions for the defense of children's rights. Let me also note that the first intercontinental meeting of these institutions is being held parallel with this session on the initiative of the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children, of which Belgium is a member.

Finally, we are resolved to listen to the children. Children, taken as individuals, must be considered as key actors in their own development. Properly understanding the obstacles that children face in their development is a first step towards effective action. The best means to achieve this is to address children directly and to give them the means to express themselves and to participate in decisions that concern them. Children, including adolescents, should be able to exercise their freedom of opinion. It is well established that active participation by children in decisions that affect them improves the effectiveness of those decisions and promotes their implementation. Participation by children in decisions that affect them is established in the draft text that we will adopt. Effective participation by children in plenary meetings of this special session and in the round tables is a convincing expression of this, and we must welcome this meaningful initiative.

Allow me in conclusion to touch on a crucial question, which is particularly close to our heart. The retention of the death penalty against those who are minors at the time of the act contravenes both the Convention on the Rights of the Child, whose universal significance should be authoritative, and also article 6, paragraph 5, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. I would like to appeal to the few countries that still retain the death penalty for those who are minors at the time of the act to abolish it as soon as possible.

Belgium is convinced that this special session will be a historic watershed in the achievement of the rights of the child. We now have a normative framework on the rights of the child. It would be enough now for us to commit ourselves to do everything possible to create a world equal to what is the deepest and most magical and richest of humanity — childhood, which for all eternity has served as a mirror of our good conscience and bad conscience as adults.

Let me conclude with the wish that childhood will henceforth be the vigilant guardian of our duties as men and women.

The President: I remind speakers that statements in plenary meeting are limited to five minutes.

I call next on His Excellency Mr. Somsavat Lengsavad, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the National Commission for Mothers and Children of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Lengsavad (Lao People's Democratic Republic): During the last 10 years, much progress has been made in the implementation of the goals of the World Summit for Children. Millions of children have been saved, more children are in school, and a number of treaties related to the protection of children have been concluded by the international community. However, these achievements have been uneven. The developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, still face numerous difficulties, especially financial ones. Today, we are gathering to reaffirm the commitments we made 11 years ago and to demonstrate our determination to seize this historic opportunity to jointly complete the unfinished agenda and address emerging issues in order to build a world that will ensure the legitimate interests of children.

In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, our Government, with support and assistance from friendly countries and international organizations, particularly the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has made considerable efforts in attaining the goals of the World Summit for Children. First and foremost, a Commission for Mothers and Children has been established from central to grass-roots levels as a follow-up mechanism for the implementation of the Summit goals. At the same time, we have improved and enacted several child-related laws that govern the exercise of the rights of the child and protect and care for children. Those laws are in conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Laos became a State party in 1991.

In realizing the right to survival, we have organized national immunization days along with routine vaccination service delivery throughout the country with the wide participation of society. As a result, achievements in many areas have been recorded. For instance, from 1990 to 2000 the rate of children under 1 year of age receiving the third dose of immunization for diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus increased from 17 percent to 53 percent. The infant mortality rate at birth has dropped from 117 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 82 per 1,000 live births in 2000. The ratio of rural people with access to clean water has climbed from 15 per cent in 1992 to 52 per cent in 2000. Nationwide consumption of iodized salt increased from 30 per cent to 80 per cent for the same period. Basic education for children has also expanded, with the net primary school enrolment of children increasing from 63 per cent in 1992 to 77.3 per cent in 2000. The most outstanding success for us was the declaration of the Lao People's Democratic Republic as a polio-free country in 2000.

Nevertheless, like other least-developed countries, we are still encountering numerous difficulties. At present, our Government has defined a series of objectives for nationwide expansion of primary health care for children and improvement of the quality of basic education, as well as the establishment of a juvenile justice system.

We stand ready to cooperate with the international community in protecting and caring for children, and will do our utmost to achieve the objectives of the World Summit for Children as well as those adopted at the present special session. In that regard, we appeal to developed countries and international organizations to continue to render support and assistance to the least developed countries in their efforts to ensure that children around the world live a prosperous and healthy life, and have access to education and adequate health-care services.

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Hawa Ahmed Youssouf, Minister in Charge of Advancement of Women, Family Welfare and Social Affairs of Djibouti.

Mrs. Youssouf (Djibouti) (*spoke in French*): Please allow me, first of all, to wish you every success in these deliberations, Mr. President. I am convinced that your experience will lead to their success.

Given the high level of participation, the holding of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, on children, is an indication of the great interest we all have in the future of our children, who are tomorrow's leaders. In that regard, I would like to congratulate Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Ms. Carol Bellamy, for all their efforts and active participation to convene this high-level meeting devoted exclusively to children. We would also like to thank and congratulate the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, Miss Patricia Durrant, for her tireless efforts over the past two years to prepare the draft outcome document, entitled "A world fit for children".

The objectives and challenges of this special session, including the consideration of the progress made in the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the World Summit for Children, in 1990, have led us to seriously consider ways and means to meet the challenges through the adoption of a common position that will be the key to improving the living conditions of our children. Indeed, despite progress in areas linked to education, health and the protection of children throughout the world — described by the report of the Secretary-General (A/S-27/3) — children continue to be victims of exploitation, ill-treatment and forced recruitment in armed conflicts. It is therefore up to us to change the negative images we see in the media by adopting a social policy that will facilitate the attainment of the objectives set by the various programmes to improve the living conditions of children.

Our Governments have firmly committed themselves to, and will continue to put into place, a policy that will place greater importance on education and the health of children, which are factors associated with the flourishing and well-being of children. Recognizing the rights of children in general is a considerable achievement, but exercising those rights is much more complex. Numerous internal and external factors of various kinds demand further thinking and cooperation if we are to be able to collectively mobilize the resources necessary to implement such a policy for the development of children.

The past decade witnessed a remarkable improvement in the situation of children and in the recognition of their rights. However, we cannot be complacent. We have an obligation to meet the challenges and to halt the terrible statistical trends that remind us of the intolerable levels of malnutrition, disease and hard labour among children, as well as the number of orphans caused by the ravages of AIDS and the millions of children who are not registered at birth or who are getting no primary education.

Before sharing with the Assembly the experience of the Republic of Djibouti, allow me to express some thoughts in areas that we believe constitute a sine qua non condition to better meeting the challenges to better development of children. More than half of the world's population lives in chronic poverty on less than $1 per day. Three quarters of those people live in sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia. The adverse effects of this situation are primarily experienced by children. That chronic poverty is also made worse by the ravages of HIV/AIDS, especially in Africa, where the prevalence of the pandemic among mothers and children threatens to decimate an entire generation of children. In addition to those two scourges and natural disasters, the children of the South are faced with hard labour, wars, forced movements, displacement and all the problems associated with these situations, which all retard the flourishing and well-being of children.

In that regard, we must not forget that for children who have never known peace the effects are both psychological and physical and constitute a permanent handicap. I am thinking of the millions of children in Somalia, Angola and Sierra Leone, and especially of the two generations of Palestinian children living under the yoke of 40 years of brutal Israeli occupation, whose futures and hopes are reduced to nothing from one day to the next, to say nothing of the psychological trauma they experience every day. Those children aspire to only one thing: to live like other children in peace and dignity with their parents and to enjoy their most fundamental rights.

In the area of education, the digital gap created by the tremendous momentum in new information technologies and by globalization heighten the already clear imbalance between North and South. The dividends of globalization are lacking for an entire segment of the world's population, and this at a time when we are talking of a global village. Underdevelopment and poverty are factors that must

first be eradicated or reduced in order to ensure that our children thrive and that we can give them a better future. My delegation fully subscribes to the idea of the Secretary-General, who has stated that investing $1 in children will return over $7 in the future. We appeal to the international community to increase its assistance for childhood education, vaccination and health.

Those are my ideas about what we should focus attention on if we wish to reach the goals we have set ourselves for a world coalition for children.

Allow me now to say a few words about the policy for children that my country has been carrying out during the past 10 years. The Government of the Republic of Djibouti signed the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child, and ratified it in the December of the same year. Djibouti has included in its domestic legislation provisions that ensure the rights of the child guaranteed in our 1992 Constitution, which strongly affirmed the right to education for everyone. Despite social and economic difficulties due to structural adjustment policies, successive Governments in the 1990s placed priority on education and health. The current Government foresees increasing the budget for national education and health by 20 per cent by 2005.

In addition, since his election to lead the country, President Ismail Omar Guelleh has reaffirmed the priority to be given to the development of Djibouti's children. In that regard, the ministry I have the honour to lead has been dealing with the well-being of children since 1999. In other words, as indicated in the evaluation report on the national plan of action for monitoring, protecting and ensuring the development of children, our country has taken action on behalf of children over the past decade.

In February 1995, the Government prepared a national policy document on family equilibrium. In February 1998, it established a national programme for risk-free pregnancy. Furthermore, efforts have also been made in the area of early childhood health and education. These include vaccination campaigns; the establishment of nutrition centres in high-risk areas; and increasing the rate of school enrolment from 38 per cent in 1990, to 40 per cent in 2000, which is proof of the success of the Government's efforts in the education sector.

With regard to the attainment of the goals of providing legal protection to children in accordance with the recommendations of the Declaration on children, the Government has established a legal framework that includes, among other things, adopting a family code and adding to Djibouti's penal code article 333, which severely punishes those guilty of female genital mutilation.

My country is aware of the importance of the question of improving the living conditions of children, and has adopted new development approaches for the coming decade. These include preparing a strategy on early childhood development, whose fundamental objective is to promote the development of Djibouti's children and to make parents aware of the importance of parental education to the development of children. In conformity with the recommendations of the Yokohama summit against the commercial sexual exploitation of children, the Government of Djibouti has also strengthened the protection of children against all forms of violence. The Government's determination in that area will be spelled out in the near future through the preparation of a child protection code. The low rate of school enrolment among young girls has led my ministry to establish a programme to promote the enrolment of girls. In the next five years, special effort will be focused on the quality of education for children in difficult circumstances.

A programme incorporating approaches to all the problems of children has recently been established in Djibouti. That programme focuses on addressing childhood illnesses comprehensively, and will enable us to reduce the infant mortality rate. Maternal mortality is estimated in Djibouti at 750 deaths per 10,000 births. My ministry has formulated plans for a network of community health providers to promote of maternal health.

With regard to democratization and the participation of Djiboutian children in the management of the country's affairs, the Government favours cooperation among our various institutions and youth movements. This policy of openness and cooperation is being carried out through: the adoption of a decree establishing the National Day of the Djiboutian Child; the integration of the Convention's provisions into the national education programme; the establishment of a children's parliament; the translation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into our national languages, Afar and Somali; and various other actions to popularize and promote the Convention through all means of communication, including national media and brochures.

Furthermore, the Government of the Republic of Djibouti, in collaboration with civil society and UNICEF, has launched preliminary activities for the world movement for children. Our Government has noted the conclusions of the work of the World Youth Forum, held in Dakar last month. The Secretary-General and the specialized agencies must be involved and must continue to assist civil-society youth movements. In addition, in the context of the international "Say yes for children" campaign, a large majority of persons questioned indicated that priority should be given to the fight against poverty.

In conclusion, I should like to appeal to the international community: the Republic of Djibouti, like the majority of countries present here, cannot meet the challenges of improving living conditions for children and fully attaining the Declaration's goals without the financial assistance and the solidarity of the international community with regard to Government programmes.

The President: I call next on His Excellency Mr. Pasquale Valentini, Minister for Education of the Republic of San Marino.

Mr. Valentini (San Marino) (*spoke in Italian; English text provided by the delegation*): On behalf of the Republic of San Marino, I wish to offer my congratulations on the organization of this world event. Its historic character and relevance are all the more evident after the tragic terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Taking into consideration the consequent threats to world peace and the recent worsening of the Middle East crisis, a renewed commitment to protect children must go hand in hand with the priority objective of creating worldwide the conditions necessary for peaceful coexistence.

Ten years ago, in this very building, an unprecedented meeting was organized, at which heads of State or Government from all the countries of the world were invited to discuss the responsibilities of the international community towards children with a view to promoting their healthy sound growth and development while fully respecting the fundamental rights of each individual. The Declaration and the Plan of Action resulting from the 1990 World Summit for Children envisaged an ambitious but realistic programme to be implemented within 10 years.

At the same time, an overwhelming number of countries were signing and ratifying the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, a major step forward in the legal framework for the protection of children's rights. As mentioned in the UNICEF document "A world fit for children" (A/AC.256/CRP.6/Rev.3), of January 2001, and on the basis of the experience gained in promoting the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, our common action should aim at three major goals: to guarantee children a good start in life in a safe environment that enables them to be physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally secure, socially competent and able to learn; to give children the possibility to complete a primary education of good quality; and to grant adolescents the opportunity to develop fully their individual capacities in a safe environment, so that they can participate in and contribute to their societies.

In that context, the Republic of San Marino has allocated considerable resources to adequately safeguard newborns through services for pregnant women and for children in their first years of life. Moreover, it has thoroughly upgraded its school system, so that almost 100 per cent of young boys and girls continue their studies until the age of 18. And now, for the proper development of their potential, San Marino has embarked on a school reform aimed at guaranteeing an individual approach.

As stated in the UNICEF document, education is crucial to the prevention of violence and to the promotion of the peaceful solution of conflicts. Therefore, "[all] boys and girls must have access to and complete primary education that is free, compulsory and of good quality" (para. 7). I should like to mention here San Marino's view of the fundamental principles of education on the basis of our past experience. In the education process, children must always be considered as human beings, bearing in mind that their personal identity always reflects their relations with others. For that reason, in order to grow in harmony, children need the presence of adults — primarily that of their parents — who can guide and lay the foundations of their education process. Therefore, as the fundamental unit responsible for the protection, upbringing and development of children, the family plays a major role in the educational process.

In the light of those principles, a global approach, in which the family is at the centre of our concerns, is necessary now more than ever. I believe that this is the right place to reflect on the fact that, besides the right of the child to education, it is fundamental to create the

conditions that enable parents to fulfil their educational tasks. Indeed, in developing countries, the family must be put at the centre of our efforts if we want to eradicate chronic poverty, the biggest obstacle to meeting children's primary needs and to protecting and promoting their rights.

Similarly, in the so-called industrialized countries, the family must be the starting point in breaking the vicious circle of aggression, violence and abuse against minors — unacceptable violations for a community based on the principles of freedom, tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The fundamental responsibility of the family in the education of minors derives from its inherent capacity to take care of the child in all his or her dimensions and, consequently, of the obvious and hidden material and spiritual needs influencing his or her growth and development.

In implementing effective national laws, policies and programmes aimed at promoting and safeguarding the rights and the well-being of children, countries must comply with international instruments and in the spirit of agreements reached during recent United Nations conferences, in particular the Millennium Summit. The objectives and strategies of that Summit are indeed useful guidelines for the development of an international framework to foster the well-being of the child.

The Republic of San Marino has made numerous and constant efforts through a comprehensive and effective awareness campaign and through its National Committee for UNICEF. Also, participation in the decision-making process is widely held to be important. That requires: the participation of Governments and parliaments, through the allocation of resources, through investment in disadvantaged children, and through the adoption of the necessary legislation; the participation of non-governmental organizations and local organizations primarily committed to safeguarding the rights of the child, which can contribute to the effective implementation of national strategies and objectives; the participation of the private sector, which can facilitate the allocation of resources destined for children; the participation of the media to raise public awareness of the needs of children; and, last but not least, the participation of children in the creation of the world they will inherit, through freedom of expression and opinion.

In the light of all I have said, I reaffirm that my Government will consider all child-related issues on a priority basis and that all sectors of the San Marino population active in this field will do their utmost to achieve the goals that will arise from this special session, prompted by the conviction that each and every country, in accordance with humanitarian principles and solidarity must bear responsibility for the creation of the human family.

All countries that have ratified the International Convention on the Rights of the Child are called upon to respect all children's rights recognized by that multilateral instrument, in keeping with their resources; they all have the legal and moral obligation to accept the principle of the best interests of the child, especially when those interests are damaged or violated.

Fortunately, it seems that the most favoured nations are becoming more aware of their responsibility in the fight against global poverty, which is one of the major causes of recurrent violations of the fundamental rights of the child.

Praiseworthy is the long-lasting campaign carried out in the 1980s and 1990s by non-governmental organizations, religious associations and international organizations with a view to raising awareness on the part of countries and the international financial institutions of the need to adopt rapid and effective measures on the very serious problem of debt. In particular, tribute must be paid to the heroism — and I believe "heroism" is the right word — demonstrated by the Jubilee 2000 Coalition, which drew attention to the serious, dramatic and tangible issue of debt relief, and which has already produced some positive results.

Much more time would be necessary to examine these problems in detail. Beyond the solemn commitments undertaken, much is still to be done to create a culture in which children are at the centre of our concerns. However, what Governments, associations and individuals do every day gives us the courage not to turn our back on suffering children.

In the hope that the special session may provide a further important impetus to the objectives of peace and social justice, I wish to stress, on behalf of the Government of San Marino, that my country intends to be on the side of children, as a fundamental sine qua non for a civilized society.

The President: I call next on His Excellency Mr. Kārlis Greiškalns, Minister for Education and Science of Latvia.

Mr. Greiškalns (Latvia) (*spoke in Latvian; English text provided by the delegation*): It is a great honour for me to address the special session of the General Assembly on children — an event of enormous significance for Latvia and for the world. On behalf of the Government of Latvia, I would like to express support and sincere appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his hard work in calling the attention of the leaders of Member States to unsolved problems that demand the coordinated efforts and activities of numerous parties. Likewise, I hold in very high esteem the contribution of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and of the Executive Director, Ms. Carol Bellamy, in organizing this event.

When world leaders convened to adopt the Plan of Action for the final stage of the twentieth century, Latvia was not yet a State Member of the United Nations, but we too have evaluated our accomplishments. A great deal has been done. In 1991, immediately after regaining its independence, Latvia signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. To fully integrate the Convention into our national legislation, a law on the protection of rights of the child was adopted in 1998. The law delineates the competences and responsibilities of each institution and provides the basis for the protection of children's rights.

A subcommittee for children's rights in the Latvian Parliament has been productive. The Cabinet of Ministers has established an inter-ministerial committee for the protection of children's rights which I have the honour to head. The committee coordinates national activities in this area and is involved in problem-solving. Our national centre for the protection of the rights of the child, in turn, monitors the implementation of the legislation adopted in the area of the rights of the child.

In all areas of Latvia, centres for the protection of the rights of the child are engaged, along with experts, in the everyday implementation of child-related legislation. Committees on the protection of the rights of the child are also very actively engaged in schools, and their members include children themselves. The aim of the committees is to promote a child's right to protection at school, and to carry out preventive and educational work for ensuring children's rights.

Accessibility and quality of education are an important contribution to the future of children. They lay the foundation for well-being and personal growth. Latvia has carried out significant educational reforms to ensure that children and teachers can work in a modern educational environment. We have also ensured that children are given opportunities to develop their special talents in sports, art, music and other areas. The State pays for this so-called interest education for every child. Latvia is ready to share its experience in the development of education with other countries.

Aware that the role of children and young people should increase, I hope that the young people taking part in the Children's Forum and in the present session will take back new ideas to Latvia, since children are a significant resource for the development of society worldwide.

I am convinced that, for every child, the United Nations will be a significant organization that makes a serious effort to increase children's welfare throughout the world and to promote children's rights in every country and every area.

The President: I call next on His Excellency Mr. Hasan Gemici, Minister of State of Turkey.

Mr. Gemici (Turkey) (*spoke in Turkish; English text provided by the delegation*): I would like to express my pleasure at attending this special session on children, which will enable us to make the world a better place for children. The special session is an important opportunity for us to reaffirm our determination to create a world fit for children and to renew our pledge to all the children in the world by continuing our efforts.

In line with the objectives of the 1990 World Summit for Children, important steps have been taken in Turkey in the last decade to implement the principles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These steps have included not only compliance with its general principles, such as non-discrimination and acting in the best interests of children, but also more concrete action towards their realization.

On this occasion, I would like to bring to the Assembly's attention some of Turkey's achievements in this field.

Legislative work to harmonize current Turkish law with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant conventions is under way. International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions 138 and 182 concerning child labour have been ratified. Cooperation programmes with international agencies such as UNICEF and the ILO are successfully being carried out. Committees charged with monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the rights of the child at various levels have been established and have begun operating, with a view to ensuring planning and coordination between relevant Government sectors.

Important progress has been made in the field of health, including a decrease of up to 50 per cent in the post-natal and infant mortality rates; the eradication of polio; and the implementation of educational programmes for family planning and for combating HIV/AIDS.

The period of compulsory education has been increased from five to 8 years, and the school attendance rate has increased to 98 per cent. Efforts aimed at eradicating the nutrition, health and education problems faced by children living in disadvantaged regions are continuing.

We have stepped up our efforts to promote and raise public awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to ensure its implementation at the local level. In this framework, various meetings have been organized, such as the most recent Second National Children's Forum, held on 20 November 2001, aimed at the realization of the rights of the child. In addition, an "Assembly of Children", with the participation of child parliamentarians from each Turkish province, was convened on 21 April 2002 in the Turkish Parliament.

We aim to provide quality education and health services to all of our children. Our priorities include: expanding protective services for children; decreasing maternal and infant mortality rates; educating and encouraging families with a view to enabling their children to exercise their rights; improving institutional care for children in need; encouraging alternative care services; protecting handicapped children and providing them with educational services; gradually eliminating child labour; protecting children from negligence, abuse and violence; increasing educational efforts to prevent HIV/AIDS; ensuring the reintegration into society of children who have broken the law; and establishing child-friendly centres and systems.

The founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, dedicated 23 April — the date of the establishment of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in 1920 — to children. Since then, every year, April 23 is celebrated as Children's Day in Turkey — thus for the first time in the world a national day has been dedicated to children. One of the objectives of Children's Day is to draw to the attention of the public the problems of children. These celebrations also provide an opportunity for a better understanding of the importance of giving priority to children, as well as for evaluating the work done for them.

Furthermore, for the last 25 years, Turkey has been holding, on 23 April — Children's Day — an international children's festival. Many countries send children's groups to Turkey to participate in the festivities, where the foundations of a more peaceful and tolerant world are being laid. In order to share the honour and pride of this wonderful and meaningful day with all the children of the world, we would like to see 23 April observed as Children's Day all over the world.

I should like to emphasize that the first regional launching of the "Say Yes For Children" campaign, initiated globally on 26 April 2001, took place on 23 April 2001 in Turkey in the context of the Children's Day celebrations.

Mrs. Nane Annan, who visited Turkey to take part in those celebrations, has extended her valuable support to the campaign. As is well-known, the "Say Yes for Children" campaign is aimed at pledging global support for the 10 critical actions needed to improve the lives of children and adolescents all over the world. We believe that this campaign, which resulted in social mobilization in Turkey, has played a very important role in raising awareness of the problems of children. Thanks to the joint efforts of the Prime Ministry and its related organizations — the ministries of Health, Labour, National Education, Justice, Foreign Affairs, the Interior and National Defence and Social Services — as well as those of the Children's Protection Agency, the Children's Rights Coalition and other non-governmental organizations, universities and local administrations, more than 16 million signatures have been collected in Turkey.

We hope that all of these signatures will attest to our determination to build a better world for all our children.

Finally, I should like express once again our gratitude to everyone who has taken part in, and contributed to, the organization of this special session.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Gaston Browne, Minister for Planning, Implementation and Public Service Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda.

Mr. Browne (Antigua and Barbuda): In 1990, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda signed a Declaration at the World Summit for Children. By signing that Declaration, my Government joined in promising the children of the world the following: an end to premature deaths and malnutrition; the establishment of universal primary education; expanded access to clean water and sanitation; and the provision of basic protection for all children.

As a party to the Convention, my Government recognizes the importance of promoting and protecting the legitimate rights and interests of our children. Health and education are at the core of our developmental strategy, to the extent that approximately 25 per cent of our budgetary allocation goes towards funding education and health care.

Our Government believes in the principle of education for all. To that end, we have provided free primary and secondary education for our youth as well as several hundred scholarships on an annual basis for our students to pursue tertiary education abroad. In addition, my Government is in the process of constructing a state-of-the-art hospital and has already constructed several modern polyclinics at strategic locations throughout the island.

Despite our country's limited natural, human and financial resources, we have, through our creativity, made significant progress in advancing the socio-economic development of our people, especially our youth. This has manifested itself in our high level of human development, to the extent that Antigua and Barbuda consistently ranks within the first quartile of the United Nations Human Development Index.

Notwithstanding the progress that we have made, we recognize that more needs to be done. Against this backdrop, we have ratified the two Optional Protocols to the Convention and have established a legal system protecting children's rights and interests. We believe that the international community now has the opportunity to achieve the goals of the Convention by mobilizing a global partnership dedicated to achieving a breakthrough in human development globally.

We know that a significant leap in human development is possible if we ensure that every child gets the best possible start in his or her early years, that every child receives a quality basic education, and that adolescents get every opportunity to develop their capabilities and to participate meaningfully in society. But this knowledge is not enough if we continue to fall short of achieving most of the goals of the World Summit for Children. What we need now is definitive action at the global level to achieve the commitments that were made at the World Summit. But definitive action requires effective leadership, and Antigua and Barbuda is prepared to do its part in providing such leadership, which we hope will inspire and broaden the partnership in realization of the basic needs and fundamental rights of our children.

During the past decade, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the willingness to recognize and confront the problem of the sexual exploitation of children and of their abuse and neglect. The magnitude of this phenomenon has not, until recently, been given adequate attention. The trafficking of children, as well as women, for sexual exploitation has reached alarming levels. I call on this Assembly to join me in providing leadership to end the problem of sexual exploitation of children.

The global rates of infant and child mortality have been declining for the past half-century and many countries that achieved the goals enjoyed reasonable economic prosperity during the past decade. In my own country, concrete measures were taken to save children's lives and our children and infant mortality rates are in keeping with those of the industrialized countries.

The Plan of Action adopted at the World Summit for Children foresaw that HIV/AIDS could offset gains in child survival, protection and development in the most seriously affected societies. Many of the achievements in social and human development of the last half of the twentieth century are now at risk. By the end of 2000, the global HIV/AIDS catastrophe had claimed nearly 22 million lives. Health services have been overwhelmed by AIDS patients. Schools

struggling to provide a decent education have had to face rising deaths among teachers and absenteeism among students who must stay home to care for AIDS-affected relatives. Faced with social stigmatization, isolation and discrimination, and deprived of basic care and financial resources, children living with HIV/AIDS and AIDS orphans are less likely to be immunized, more likely to be malnourished, less likely to go to school and more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

If ever an issue cried out for leadership, this is it. Once again, I ask members to join me in providing leadership to end the HIV/AIDS pandemic among the most vulnerable of our society — our children.

Mr. Ibramov (Kyrgyzstan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Our children are the victims of abuse, neglect and exploitation. The magnitude of these phenomena has not been given adequate attention. Accidents, violence and suicide are the leading causes of death among adolescents. These are frequently related to alcohol and drug abuse, which often stem from alienation, social exclusion and the breakdown of the family, as well as the inadequacy of state protection mechanisms. My Government views the protection of children's rights as a common cause of the international community and calls for concerted efforts by all countries to redouble their efforts in protecting our children.

Let me conclude by noting that the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a touchstone and set of standards to guide all policies and actions in addressing the best interests of our children. Creating or ensuring a world fit for children should be our imperative. Therefore, I hope that the outcome of this special session will provide the necessary leadership which will focus on the empowerment of our children to become successful adults.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Siiri Oviir, Minister for Social Affairs of Estonia.

Mrs. Oviir (Estonia): I am very pleased to be here in New York today. It is a great honour for me to represent Estonia at the General Assembly's special session on children, which is to adopt a programme for the well-being of all children in the world over the next decade.

In 1990, when the World Summit was held, Estonia was not yet an independent State. For now, our dreams of restoring and building up our own State have come true. Today, we can speak with confidence about Estonia as one of the future States members of the European Union. Over a relatively short period of time, Estonia has experienced major political, economic and social changes that have touched everyone's lives. Like many other countries, we are now facing new challenges, resulting, among other things, from a declining and ageing population.

Estonia, a country with a population of only 1.4 million, belongs to the family of small nations of the world. The birth of each and every child is therefore crucial for the survival and sustainable development of our nation. However, it is even more important for each and every child to be brought up in a safe and child-friendly environment where the best possible quality of life is promoted.

I very much welcome the Summit's call upon Governments to invest in children. This is especially significant today as, with fewer babies being born and more families determined not to have children in many of our societies, there will also be fewer people who are truly concerned for the well-being of children. Given limited financial resources, there is always a danger that the interests and needs of children will be overshadowed by those of the adult population in the competition for government investments.

As in other societies in transition, not all people in Estonia have been able to keep up with rapid changes and benefit from social development and economic growth, nor have the tensions and contradictions accompanying dramatic changes in society left children untouched. Difficulties parents experience when adjusting to the rapid changes or when facing unemployment or other problems have a direct impact on the quality of life of children. Moreover, for children, growing up in poverty and deprivation often means living in poverty and with limited choices over their lifetime.

On the other hand, children whose parents are coping very well with their lives are also often deprived of something very important, since the success of parents comes at its own price. Children in so-called job-rich, time-poor families are likely to suffer from emotional loneliness and distress. Drug abuse and the spread of HIV, the increased usage of alcohol and tobacco or other kinds of self-destructive behaviour are new problems emerging among children

and adolescents, indicating weakening social bonds within the family and society as a whole.

The role of the State in improving the quality of life of children and families with children cannot be limited only to granting traditional family benefits. Education is one of the areas where government investment is more than crucial.

Today in Estonia children with special needs also have better opportunities than ever to acquire quality education that meets their interests and abilities. For example, 10 years ago computer literacy was the privilege of a few experts. Today every school has computers and Internet access, and it is the children who teach digital skills to their parents and grandparents. However, the prospects of all children to acquire the desired level of education are not yet equal. Unfortunately, choices in this regard far too often depend on where the child lives and on the quality of his or her pre-school education. Sadly enough, children's educational paths may sometimes depend on the social and economic status of their parents.

We have also seen an increasing number of children drop out of school. Some children have obtained only a basic level of education; some have even failed to do even that, meaning that there are more young people unable to find a proper job. We all know that the choice of a first school can determine all other life choices. To give all children a sure start in life, from July this year every child of pre-school age in Estonia will be entitled to kindergarten services. In order to prevent educational stratification and to reduce the dropout rate it is necessary to design programmes and methods that match the different needs and abilities of children. Enhancing social skills that are crucial to successful entry into the labour market — such as cooperation, communication and problem-solving skills — must become an indispensable part of general education.

The well-being of a whole generation and its opportunities to obtain further education and find good quality jobs — their adult "playground" in society — depends on what is being taught at school and how it is being taught. Therefore the best investment in children we can make is to guarantee equally good and diversified educational choices and opportunities for all the children of the world. As far as I am concerned, this is also the best strategy we have at our disposal to prevent poverty and social exclusion for both children and future adults.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Meir Sheetrit, Minister of Justice of Israel.

Mr. Sheetrit (Israel): As a reflection of our unwavering commitment to putting our children first and to protecting their rights and enhancing their health, education and opportunities in Israel and around the world, Israel is proud to be participating today in this special session on children. It is they who will inherit the world and chart the course of the future. Our obligation to our children is indistinguishable from our obligation to humanity.

Israel would like to extend its congratulations to Ms. Carol Bellamy, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and to the Secretary-General for the wonderful work they are doing for the children of the world.

Israel understands that cultural differences are manifold among the nations participating in this special session. But when it comes to our children, certain basic principles are universal and beyond dispute. We must speak with one voice in condemnation of such immoral practices as child labour, the recruitment of child soldiers and other forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. Israel is committed to these objectives, and it is in this vein that we welcome the document that we will be adopting tomorrow — entitled "A world fit for children" — and we appreciate all the hard work involved in its preparation.

Our strong commitment to children's rights was demonstrated long before Israel's accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1990. And that commitment was also reflected in our signing, last November, of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention — on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the prohibition of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography — with a view to ratifying them in the near future. Since becoming a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Israel has undergone comprehensive reform in the field of children's rights. The scope of that reform is unique by any international standard.

In the area of law, more than 20 comprehensive bills have been passed by the Israeli parliament. Every child in Israel is guaranteed the right to health

insurance and free education through the twelfth grade. In particular, we have codified into law the concept of the dignity of the child, thereby enabling children to have a meaningful say with regard to their rights in the education system. In 1997, the Ministry of Justice, which I have the privilege of heading, appointed an intergovernmental committee of experts to re-examine the entire body of Israeli law in the light of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to present recommendations for the implementation of the Convention. The appointment of that committee was undoubtedly one of the most ambitious and comprehensive legislative initiatives of its kind in the world today. The committee's work is still being conducted, and children and youth are actively participation in the process.

We have also undertaken an extensive public campaign and enacted new laws that have contributed dramatically to increasing public awareness of the problem of child abuse and neglect. Special facilities and treatment programmes have also been developed for abused children. A special parliamentary committee on the status of children has been established in the Israeli Knesset and in the municipalities of Israel. Children are regular participants in those committees.

Israel today finds itself facing a particularly difficult situation. Palestinian terrorist organizations are making increasing use of children and minors to carry out suicide attacks. Over the past nine months, there have been more than 13 Palestinian children under the age of 18 involved in carrying out suicide attacks. This cruel and cynical exploitation of children by terrorist organizations is a blatant violation of basic norms and principles of international law and of children's rights. It even stands in contradiction of Islamic law. I ask members of the Assembly to think about what passes through the heads of parents and of the people who send children of that age to commit suicide. How can one live with such a burden on his own soul? Allow me to present a number of striking examples.

Jamil Hamid, a 16-year-old recruited by Fatah, Chairman Arafat's own faction, blew himself up on 31 March 2002 near a medical clinic, injuring six Israeli citizens. There is also the case of Yusef Zaqout, a 14-year-old Palestinian boy who was killed along with two friends — each of them 15 years old — when they tried to attack an Israeli community with knives and explosives. Another example is that of Anwar Hamad, a 17-year-old youth, who was sent to carry out a suicide attack against a convoy of vehicles.

Protecting the rights of such children, as enshrined in the basic norms and principles of international law, is a universal interest of humanity as a whole, and everything possible must be done to prevent terrorists from turning children into cannon fodder.

The death of any child — Palestinian or Israeli — is a terrible tragedy and a curse. Dozens of Israeli children have been killed, and many more have been wounded, since the Palestinians initiated their campaign of violence and terrorism in September 2000. The children of Israel have been the victims of brutal terrorist attacks and of countless suicide bombers, who have maimed them on school buses, in shopping centres, in restaurants, in marketplaces and even in their homes. I ask: what would any Member State do if it were under attack for 17 months, with an average of 21 terrorist attacks per day? I do not believe that any other Member State would restrain itself as Israel has. But we have the inherent right to protect our people — to protect our children. It is an inherent right given to Israel by United Nations resolutions, and it is an inherent right of every State in the world.

I want to assure members that we still extend our hands in a quest for peace, and we have proved that in many ways. I was astonished when I saw the Palestinian delegation's suggestion to try to change the document on which we have worked so hard so that it can be adopted tomorrow. Why are they doing that? Let me tell the Assembly. No automatic majority will make them right, because the Arab Group and the Non-Aligned Group know in their hearts who is to blame for the situation: just one man, the leader of the Palestinian people, who rejected the offer that had been given to him in September 2000 by President Clinton and Prime Minister Barak to establish a Palestinian State on 98 per cent of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, including three quarters of East Jerusalem. When he was on the verge of having it all, he rejected it, went back to our area and started the wave of terror that brought disaster to his own people.

Arafat is not fighting for his people; he is betraying them and betraying his own children. I feel so sorry for every Palestinian, every Palestinian child who have been hurt. Seeing them hurt is as painful to me as seeing all the Israeli children who have been

hurt, because I know that they are very talented and could have had a different future. Why are such young boys committing suicide? How could such things happen in the twenty-first century without strong and constant incitement by the Palestinian Authority, carried out daily on television and in textbooks? Show me a Middle East map on which Israel appears in any textbook of the Palestinian Authority, and I will give you a prize. Why does no one speak about that? But we are still looking for peace.

I should like to conclude by expressing my sincere hope that we will learn from the lessons of the past so that the world becomes a place fit for children. Children are our most precious natural resource, and we must do everything in our power to enable them to grow and live in peace, free from violence and fear, so that they can fulfil their potential and realize their dreams.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Pehin Dato Haji Hussain, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports of Brunei Darussalam.

Mr. Hussain (Brunei Darussalam): On behalf of my delegation, I bring greetings from the Government of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam to the Assembly and to all those responsible for organizing this very special session. I also take this opportunity to congratulate the President and the other members of the Bureau on their election to lead this special session as a follow-up to the 1990 World Summit for Children.

During this special session, we will focus our attention on three basic issues: the best possible start in life for all children; a good-quality basic education for all children; and opportunities for all children — especially adolescents — for meaningful participation in their communities. Let us hope and pray that those goals will be reached. May the global movement for children be a part of our lives as we endeavour to provide our children with lives of quality.

At the World Summit for Children in 1990, specific issues were addressed for review by Governments, as stipulated in the Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s. The issues are: the Convention on the Rights of the Child; child health; food and nutrition; the role of women, maternal health and family planning; the role of the family; basic education and literacy; children in especially difficult circumstances; the protection of children during armed conflicts; children and the environment; and the alleviation of poverty and the revitalization of economic growth.

This session will provide us with the opportunity to review our achievements. However, we should be more alert to critical areas pertaining to our respective countries, and all opportunities should be explored by United Nations funding agencies to provide aid to the countries concerned.

The participation of children is another important factor in this special session. Brunei Darussalam brought two of its children to participate in the Children's Forum.

In May 2001, the Fifth Ministerial Consultation on Shaping the Future for Children was held in Beijing for the region of East Asia and the Pacific. At that meeting, a Declaration on the future of children was formulated. The Declaration was indeed timely, as all Governments made a commitment to bring about a better future for children in their respective countries. In addition, the participation of children was given special attention. On the first day of the meeting, children were given the opportunity to speak and to voice their opinions. Not only were the voices of children being heard, but laws and policies in some countries started to reflect the rights of the child.

The commitment to children is not only reflected in individual countries through laws and policies; a more significant step was made within the region of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Declaration on the Commitments For Children in ASEAN was signed during the Fourth Meeting of ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare, held in Singapore from 1 to 3 August 2001. The Declaration will provide the guiding principles for ASEAN member countries in enhancing the survival, protection and development of children in the ASEAN region. The Declaration is the first document of the millennium fully dedicated to ASEAN children. However, ASEAN's commitment to children started long before the Declaration was first discussed; in 1993, ASEAN ministers responsible for social welfare signed the ASEAN Plan of Action on Children.

Poverty is a monumental problem. In restructuring the entire welfare system, we should be careful to look at a more holistic approach and consider

other areas such as education, good parenting skills and sound mental health. Alleviating poverty in the lives of millions of children would be a monumental step towards improving the quality of life of all our children.

We must fight to eradicate child poverty. We must fight because no child should come into this world only to find all the doors already closed. We must fight because only by investing in children can we break the cycle of poverty. Only then will there be real hope for the future of our children.

Since neglect is primarily a problem of poverty, a structural solution is needed to restore the welfare system with regard to children. To that end, an economic safety net including universal child development programmes should be part and parcel of the whole welfare system. However, we should give credit to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in particular, as well as to other United Nations agencies, as there are many programmes that have been developed to aid children at risk because of poverty, abuse and neglect.

The special session is an important follow-up to the 1990 World Summit for Children and an important review of the progress made for children. In this respect, allow me to share the efforts made in Brunei Darussalam for the welfare, survival and protection of children.

Brunei Darussalam acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 23 December 1995. Even prior to acceding to the Convention, Brunei Darussalam had started drafting laws to enhance the position of children in wide-ranging areas. After acceding to the Convention, Brunei Darussalam passed its Children Order 2000 to further protect the welfare of children, particularly that of abused and neglected children. The Order also provides that the best interests of the child shall always be the paramount consideration when any question arises with respect to the welfare of the child. In addition, the Islamic Family Law, passed in 1999, regulates laws relating to Muslim families. That particular law also includes matters pertaining to the maintenance and guardianship or custody of children.

The Islamic Adoption of Children Order and the Adoption of Children Order 2001, which both came into force on 26 March 2001, regulate the adoption of Muslim children in Brunei Darussalam.

With regard to mechanisms for strengthening and coordinating policies relating to children, the National Children's Council was established, and was officially launched on 18 January 2001 by Her Royal Highness Pengiran Isteri Hajah Mariam. It is tasked with monitoring rules and regulations pertaining to children. The Council consists of members from the Government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations.

The Social Affairs Services Unit of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports is the agency responsible for the welfare and development of children in Brunei Darussalam. The Unit also acts as the focal point for child-related matters.

Brunei Darussalam works closely with UNICEF with regard to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in particular and matters relating to children in general. In fact, several seminars and workshops, including a regional consultative meeting, were held jointly with UNICEF in Brunei Darussalam in 1996. Likewise, a number of senior officials from Brunei Darussalam have attended courses, seminars and workshops organized by UNICEF abroad. Cooperation with UNICEF and with other regional and international organizations has proven beneficial to our country.

We have made tremendous achievements not only in the legal sphere but also in the fields of health and education. In the health sector, with increasing public awareness of health issues and the privilege of a good and sound socio-economic status, Brunei Darussalam continues to enjoy and progress towards good health status. Health care is free for all children in the country. The infant mortality rate has steadily declined to 5.9 per 1,000 live births in 1999. That includes babies born as prematurely as the twenty-fourth week of gestation. The childhood mortality rate too has remained low and even significantly declined to 0.4 per 1,000 for the 1-4 years age group in 1999. Both the infant and the under-5-years mortality rates have shown an enormous improvement over the last 20 years. Those mortality rates are comparable to those of other advanced nations. Continuous efforts are being made to sustain that good status of health among children. The childhood immunization rate is above 95 per cent, and Brunei Darussalam is free of all major and minor communicable diseases. Ninety-nine per cent of the population has access to clean, safe and fluorinated water.

Children with special needs are given priority. Not only are disabilities prevented through optimal prenatal and postnatal care but children with identified specific learning or physical disabilities are provided with the appropriate rehabilitation and therapies to suit their specific needs in order to optimize their functioning and potential.

The National Advisory and Coordinating Committee for Children with Special Needs is a multidisciplinary committee focusing on children with special needs. The non-governmental organizations and the private sector are actively involved with the social activities of those children as well.

The education sector has also shown tremendous improvement and developments over the years, comparable to the success seen in the health sector. The 1997 declaration on inclusive education allows all children with special needs to be included in the normal school system. The provision of education has been, and always will be, one of the main items on the national agenda of the Government of Brunei Darussalam.

Schooling is available to all, education is free to all citizens, and the literacy rate is above 90 per cent. Among the goals of the national education system is the provision of 12 years of education to every child. The school curriculum caters to all children according to level, ability and need, including those children with special needs.

Brunei has gone a long way towards addressing child-related issues and concerns. Although, as I mentioned earlier, many positive developments have been achieved, there are still many areas which need to be addressed. For example, much remains to be done in the field of children's health care. Emphasis must be placed on prevention, which can discourage the development of chronic disease later in life. To this end, a $60 million budget has been passed to build a hospital for mothers and children in the near future.

Brunei is indeed fortunate not to have to be concerned with such issues as child labour, street children, children in armed conflict and the trafficking of children, among others. Nonetheless, appropriate agencies are available to address such issues.

As I mentioned earlier, Brunei had already started to work on its laws and policies on children even before we acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, in the course of implementing it — including during the process of drafting our report on the Convention — we have found the Convention most useful. It has allowed us to be introspective with respect to our own laws and policies regarding children, and I believe that it has given us great impetus to be more focused in addressing matters of grave concern with respect to the children of Brunei Darussalam, especially in the area of enhancing and strengthening our work on the protection of abused and neglected children. I am sure that we are not alone in holding this view of what the Convention has meant to us.

Children are the adults of tomorrow, and it is the duty of the adults of today to take a firm stand and resolute action to provide the best possible lives for children today and in future.

I would like to conclude my statement by expressing once again my sincere thanks to you, Mr. President, and to the Bureau for the successful organization of this special session. It is indeed a pleasure to have been able to share with the Assembly today some of our experiences in matters pertaining to children.

I will close by reiterating "Say Yes to Children".

The Acting President: May I remind representatives that the time limit for statements at this session is five minutes.

I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Nada Korac, President of the Commission for Cooperation with UNICEF of Yugoslavia.

Ms. Korac (Yugoslavia): I would like to congratulate Mr. Han Seung-soo on his election as President of this important special session of the General Assembly dedicated to children. I am certain that, under his guidance and leadership, the General Assembly will take a significant step forward in our efforts to build a better and safer environment for the younger generation throughout the world.

I wish to thank all of the dedicated and hard-working people who participated in the preparatory process for the special session, particularly Ambassador Patricia Durrant, as well as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and its Executive Director, Ms. Carol Bellamy. Their work has made this historic event a resounding success on the road to building a world fit for children.

During the past decade, the children of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia grew up in a very different world — so different that it would not be an overstatement to say that those born since 1990 hardly had a single day of normal life before they reached the age of 10. Like millions of children the world over, their environment has been shaped by war, social and political crises, isolation and poverty.

In this difficult situation, the reforms made possible by the democratic changes of 2000 still have a long way to go before children have a chance fully to benefit from their effects. The reforms that concern children the most — those in the sectors of social affairs, education, health and justice — are already under way. To ensure that they affect children's lives in a more direct way, my country is in the process of discussing and creating an overall children's policy.

In working towards these general goals, we will ensure better coordination among the relevant ministries on child-related issues. The most appropriate strategy to make such coordination effective and productive would be one that is based on the child-rights approach. However, public awareness of child rights is not widespread, and substantial information and education efforts will be needed to increase it.

Meanwhile, due to the pressure created by the scope and urgency of problems in this area, the Government has often had to act as a sort of fire brigade, solving problems in isolation and on an ad hoc basis. In order to change this situation, we will be establishing an appropriate inter-ministerial body charged with developing rights-based child-related policies and with monitoring and coordinating their implementation. In addition, an Ombudsperson's Office is about to be established, with a Deputy in charge of child-rights issues. We hope that UNICEF and other relevant international organizations will give us their full support in this regard.

To carry out all the necessary economic, social and institutional reforms, substantial investment is needed. In this context, international support and regional cooperation are of vital importance, as is the mobilization of resources and the building of partnerships within the country itself. The civil sector has a lot to offer in this regard, especially in the area of human rights in general, including the rights of the child. During the past decade it filled the void resulting from the lack of governmental capacity, interest and intervention, and gathered professionals with valuable expertise. Therefore, partnerships between the Government and the non-governmental organizations that keep the partners' identities and independence intact may prove to be a key element in making child rights a reality in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

To achieve the goals established by the outcome document of the special session, international, regional and local consensus and partnerships are essential. The consensus and partnerships must surely include those for whose benefit they are established: the children themselves. In that regard, this session is of historic significance, since, for the first time, children are provided the opportunity to participate actively in a United Nations session. Some may say that this participation is symbolic; yet it does give an important impetus to their genuine involvement in decision-making processes that affect them.

However, in order to enable and empower children with respect to such participation, they must be provided appropriate information formulated in a language that is in keeping with children's developing capacities and that they can understand.

We, the participants in this special session, are now in a position to endorse such an effort: the child-friendly version of the outcome document produced during the preparations for the third preparatory meeting. I therefore propose that this version, once finalized to faithfully reflect the final text of "A World Fit for Children", be published as a document of the Global Movement for Children. UNICEF and the non-governmental organization partners — most notably Save the Children, which has been preparing the document — should assist in disseminating the document and in working with Governments around the world to make it available to children in their local languages. Thus, adequately informed about the commitments their Governments have made for them, children in all countries will be in a better position to contribute to the process of their implementation.

However, the well-being of the world's children — that is, the protection, fulfilment, promotion of and respect for the rights of each child, established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child — remains the responsibility of adults and therefore the prime task of world Governments. Therefore, we all must continue to work very hard to

make sure that we keep the promises we are now making to our children.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Goretti Nduwimana, Minister for Social Affairs and Advancement for Women of Burundi.

Mrs. Nduwimana (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): The President of the Republic of Burundi wished to participate personally in this special session. Unfortunately, urgent matters have required his presence in our country. He has therefore given me the honour of representing him and of conveying his message.

Burundi welcomes the initiative of the United Nations and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to devote a special session to promoting the rights and well-being of children and, on this occasion, to evaluating progress achieved since the 1990 World Summit for Children. Burundi deeply appreciates the convening of this session, all the more so because it is a country in crisis. Like every country in such a situation, we find that children are always among the first innocent victims of violence and its many consequences. Thus, a growing global awareness of the difficulties experienced by children can only be a source of satisfaction. We hope that this growing awareness will be accompanied by concrete activities and projects conducive significantly to improving the lot of children, especially those living in countries in difficulty.

My country participated in the World Summit for Children here in New York in 1990 and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in August of that year. In keeping with the recommendations of that conference, Burundi undertook specific action to improve the situation of children, which has been deeply exacerbated by war and the AIDS pandemic. In 1992, a national programme of action was developed by an inter-ministerial committee, with the support of UNICEF, and a national follow-up committee was launched.

A broad campaign to promote school attendance has been carried out, enabling us to effect a net improvement in the gross rate of primary school attendance, which has risen from 43 per cent to 68 per cent over the past five years. Vaccination campaigns have been undertaken, allowing us significantly to improve the inoculation rate, especially for polio, for which the rate has reached 95 per cent. I take this opportunity to extend from this high rostrum the warmest thanks of the Government of Burundi to UNICEF for its contribution to the creation of these programmes.

It is deeply regrettable that this momentum achieved by the people and Government of Burundi in promoting the well-being of children has been curbed by a fratricidal war. Allow me therefore to stress the fact that the international community should pay special attention to the root causes behind disastrous situations for children: war, poverty and AIDS. On the day when the world succeeds in extinguishing the flames of war, overcoming poverty and defeating AIDS, the situation of our children will surely improve.

In this regard, I wish, on behalf of my Government, to extend our great appreciation to the international community for its efforts to resolve conflicts in our Great Lakes region. The recent visit of a Security Council delegation to the region was eloquent testimony to those efforts.

With respect to my country in particular, the Government has always affirmed and now reaffirms its commitment to negotiating with the armed groups so as to achieve a permanent ceasefire as soon as possible. We take this opportunity once again to call for the international community's support in pursuing our efforts to convince the armed groups immediately to forsake acts of violence and to return to the negotiating table. Burundi also calls for the support of its partners in the context of the pledges made at the Paris conference in December 2000 and reaffirmed at the Geneva conference in December 2001. That support would undoubtedly allow my country to shake off its endemic poverty and its direct impact on the well-being of children.

I wish every success to this session in the earnest hope that the recommendations to emerge from it will allow our States to make steady progress in building a more united world in greater solidarity, for the happiness of our beloved children. I wish to affirm the commitment of the Government of Burundi to the implementation of the plan of action to be issued at this gathering.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by The Honourable Larry Anthony, MP, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs of Australia.

Mr. Anthony (Australia): In 1990, at the World Summit for Children, Australia joined with other countries to affirm our commitment to children. We have all travelled a long road since then and much has been achieved, but, if we are to be honest, not enough has been done for the children of the world.

This forum provides a unique opportunity for us to learn from and build on one another's experiences since that time and to renew our efforts to address the challenges that remain. Importantly, the children of the world have assembled here to assist us with the challenges ahead. I would like to particularly recognize Emily Simpson and Tim Goodwin, who join me as part of the Australian delegation to this forum. The United Nations Children's Fund is to be congratulated for its excellent work in bringing these events to fruition.

Over the past decade, the Convention on the Rights of the Child has helped raise awareness of children's rights and provided a framework for addressing the needs of children. However, many fundamental challenges to the well-being of children remain. Millions of children throughout the world continue to live in poverty-stricken conditions and to experience daily the lack of adequate food, shelter and access to health and education facilities. The continued subjection of children to the worst forms of child labour, sexual and other physical abuse and exploitation, and their use and abuse in armed conflict remind us how far we have to go in protecting child rights and in giving all children a better future.

The Australian Government is committed to enhancing children's health and educational outcomes and to supporting all families with children. We encourage partnerships among Government, businesses, communities and families to provide innovative children's services. Our support for children begins with perinatal services and continues through childhood. To give Australian children the best start in life, we provide parenting support, family payments, health services, child care and high-quality education.

In many areas, we have a proud record. One is the area of immunization, where, through direct Government intervention, we have achieved a dramatic increase. We now have nearly 90 per cent of our young Australian children fully immunized. Our work with our state governments to achieve high national standards of education is another achievement of which we are proud.

In seeking to implement the goals of the World Summit for Children, Australia continues to face a number of challenges. We are working hard to ensure better education and health outcomes for all children, particularly aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children. We are also promoting gender equality through our Beijing +5 Action Plan. That approach is complemented by the work of our independent Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, which plays an important role in educating the public about human rights, including children's rights. We are encouraged by the willingness of the international community to sign recent Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Australia signed the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography on 18 December 2001. The Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict is under active consideration.

In addition to taking those measures at home, Australia is supporting, in a practical way, the cause of children globally. Australia's development cooperation programme benefits children through its poverty reduction focus, which aims to improve access to the basic health, nutrition and education services that every child in the world needs to survive and to thrive. Our aim is to ensure that our aid helps women and girls participate fully in economic and social life.

The international community now faces major challenges that were not identified at the World Summit. One of them is HIV/AIDS, which has had a devastating impact on children. In addressing those global challenges, it is vital that the momentum generated by last year's special session on HIV/AIDS be maintained. In October 2001, Australia hosted a regional ministerial meeting on HIV/AIDS, and it is implementing a six-year, $200 million global HIV/AIDS initiative.

Developments in communications technology since the World Summit offer new opportunities to improve the lives of children. The Australian Government is contributing up to $200 million over five years to the Virtual Colombo Plan — a joint initiative with the World Bank that includes use of the Internet to help teachers upgrade their skills and to improve the quality of basic education for children in many countries.

Every day as dawn breaks, we must ensure that our children's future is better than it was yesterday. As the leader of the Australian delegation to this session and, more important, as a father, I believe that if the world is to be a better place and fit for children, we must put children first.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Hor Namhong, Senior Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

Mr. Hor (Cambodia) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia, I wish to express our congratulations to the United Nations on having convened this important special session on children. I believe that this gathering, held here at the United Nations to debate the great challenges facing the world's children and to share our concerns on that subject, has relevance and importance that we all recognize.

We all know that the lives of children today are negatively affected by the poverty that is present in many regions of the world and by a lack of access to everything — health, education, nourishment and personal security. Such poverty is aggravated by the adverse effects of globalization on developing countries. Globalization has also exacerbated the problems of children, such as child prostitution, child pornography and other forms of child exploitation.

(*spoke in English*)

I now wish to share with the Assembly what Cambodia has done with respect to the protection and promotion of the rights of our children. In terms of concrete action, the Cambodian National Council for Children has been established as a national mechanism for coordination, participation, consultation and monitoring with regard to the implementation of children's rights. Many efforts have been undertaken for the well-being of Cambodian children — particularly in the most needy rural areas — with respect to, inter alia, health care, education, nutrition and safe water supply. Polio was successfully eradicated in 1997. As for HIV/AIDS prevention, the Five-Year Common Strategy 2001-2005 has been implemented and an awareness campaign has been carried out, resulting in some concrete behavioural changes. Furthermore, the Say Yes campaign was launched by Prime Minister Hun Sen on April 26 last year. The campaign's three key priorities are to educate every child, to exclude no child and to fight HIV/AIDS among children. The campaign has mobilized public support and has strengthened cooperation at all levels throughout the country.

As part of its commitment to children, Cambodia has ratified a number of conventions, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the two Optional Protocols to that Convention — on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography — and International Labour Organization Convention 138.

In the framework of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Cambodia has consistently committed itself to the rights and protection of children through the 1993 ASEAN Plan of Action on Children. That Plan identifies, inter alia, the need to create opportunities for children to express their views, to advocate their rights and to voice their concerns; the need to ensure a better future for the ASEAN child by guaranteeing basic health care and by promoting access to education; the need to protect children from HIV/AIDS and drug abuse; and the need to protect children from all forms of violence, abuse, trafficking and exploitation.

On this occasion, I wish to urge not only that the outcome document of this special session on children be adopted but also, and more important, that concrete action be undertaken in developing countries in order to help children have more access to education and health care and to end child trafficking once and for all. If there is no such concrete action, the current situation of the world's children will only continue to deteriorate.

Finally, as far as Cambodia is concerned, we are strongly committed to join the United Nations and the rest of the international community in collective action and in the shared responsibility to promote the well-being of children worldwide, with a view to creating a world fit for children and a better world for future generations. That will require deeds, not words.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Askalu Menkerios, Minister of Labour and Human Welfare of Eritrea.

Mrs. Menkerios (Eritrea): Allow me to express, on behalf of the President of the State of Eritrea, Mr. Isaias Afwerki, and on my own account, the gratitude

of my Government to the organizers of this special session of the General Assembly. I wish to congratulate the members and the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee for a job well done under the chairmanship of Ambassador Patricia Durrant of Jamaica and with the indispensable guidance of Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and her team. My President regrets his absence from this important session due to other pressing commitments, and I feel honoured to address the General Assembly on his behalf.

Humanity's commitment to the welfare and protection of children cannot be an issue for debate as, indeed, children are the bearers of our collective heritage and civilization, as well as the prospective fulfillers of our unrealized hopes and dreams. My Government recognizes, however, that the fulfilment of these aspirations will not come easily. That is especially true for impoverished and war-torn societies, where children, along with other vulnerable groups such as women and the elderly, often bear the brunt of the burden. Thus, there is a need for special measures, both legal and practical, to mitigate their precarious situation.

I say this speaking from Eritrea's long experience in dealing with the plight of children during the decades of its armed struggle for national independence. Those are also the reasons that prompted my Government to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994 and to articulate soon after a comprehensive action programme in the form of our initial report on the implementation of the Convention in Eritrea.

At the special session, we have the opportunity to review the commitments we made 12 years ago and to draw up a further plan of action for the good of the children of the world. Eritrea's commitment to the well-being of children has been sustained even in the most difficult times of war. I am proud to say that investment in children has been one of the top national priorities. Eritrea has achieved some progress in several aspects related to the care, protection and overall development of children, especially of those in need of special protection measures.

A national committee, regional committees and a task force consisting of experts have been put in place to oversee the implementation of the Convention's provisions for the care, protection and development of children in Eritrea. Commendable efforts have been made to educate and to disseminate information concerning the rights of children in several local languages throughout the nation and to all segments of society.

Programmes such as those for family reunification and the adoption of orphans and the strengthening of community coping mechanisms through the provision of microcredits have been some of the remarkable endeavours. We thank our dedicated civil servants, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and the people of Eritrea for their relentless efforts in this regard.

The Say Yes for Children campaign was a step forward in mobilizing the participation of citizens from all walks of life in Eritrea. Indeed, the campaign was a great success. The Eritrean people supported, through national opinion polls, the following three fundamental priorities of the 10 rallying points of the Global Movement for Children: education for all children; combating HIV/AIDS; and caring for all children. The Government of Eritrea, acting in accordance with the priorities set by the general public, has arranged to disseminate the results of the polls throughout the country in a special magazine published for that purpose. The magazine was translated into three local languages for wider circulation.

Concrete steps have been taken to implement the aforementioned programmes. Those steps are reflected in the longer version of my statement, copies of which have just been distributed. Inasmuch as they are the principal stakeholders, efforts have been made to involve children and youth as active partners in this process through special activities such as children's parliaments, education, skill training and youth-to-youth programmes.

Despite all those efforts, however, some of the promises still remain unfulfilled. There is a greater need to strengthen the capacities of national institutions and civil society organizations. There is a dearth of human resources and funds to meet ongoing and emerging undertakings, such as caring for refugee children, orphans, deportees and war-affected children, which are a high priority in my country.

The agenda for the next decade is clear. The realization of that agenda will depend on critically needed funds, leadership, partnerships and extensive support from the international community. It is time for

Governments, United Nations agencies, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and the youth and children to act together to implement all provisions of the Convention and the draft plan of action that the Assembly is about to adopt.

Meanwhile, Governments must commit themselves to taking groundbreaking steps and to mobilizing nationwide support to ensure that the targeted goals and the 10 rallying points of the Global Movement for Children become realities. Our commitments must be translated into action in order to create a world fit for children now and for the generations to come.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable John Manley, Deputy Prime Minister of Canada.

Mr. Manley (Canada): I am proud to stand here today on behalf of Canada's Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, and the people of Canada to renew and to reaffirm our commitment to the rights and well-being of children, as we did 11 years ago at the first World Summit for Children. That this gathering for children was delayed by seven months because of terrorist attacks just blocks away from here only gives greater impetus to our mission of ensuring a better world for the next generation.

That is not an abstract concept. The need for action and sustained commitment is real and urgent. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 2.1 billion children are living on this Earth today and that more than a quarter of them — close to 600 million children and infants — live in poverty. More than 120 million cannot go to school. And most devastating of all, some 11 million children — an unimaginable number — die each year, often from preventable causes, be they hunger, disease or war.

By calling the world to action at the 1990 children's Summit, some progress has been achieved in our global community. That Summit's Declaration and agenda for action, as well as the near universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1989, have improved many children's lives in real and concrete ways and have guided the actions of Governments. We have also since welcomed the Convention's two Optional Protocols, on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and we have created new standards on issues such as child labour.

Canada believes that children and youth have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives, as do all people. We are pleased to see this increasingly recognized and respected. The participation of just under 400 children and youth in this special session and its preparatory process — including, I should add, five very impressive and dedicated young Canadians representing all regions of our country, including our aboriginal people — has enriched and enlightened both them and us.

(*spoke in French*)

The protection of children and the promotion of their rights are essential not only to their own well-being, but also to the progress and prosperity of our societies and our countries as a whole. In Canada, our most recent national census in 2001 counted some 5.9 million children under the age of 14 living in Canada — one fifth of our population. We are committed to ensuring that they all get the best possible start in life and have continued support as they grow. It is our duty to ensure that they are ready and have the right tools to learn so that they may gain the skills, knowledge, motivation and creative freedom needed to live full and rewarding lives. The provision of quality health services, regardless of income, the assurance of safe communities and of a clean, healthy environment are essential to achieving this goal.

(*spoke in English*)

These are characteristics often associated with Canada, and we know that we are fortunate in the prosperity and quality of life that we enjoy as a nation. But we are also deeply concerned that too many families in Canada live in difficult circumstances. We are determined to help all parents realize their hopes and dreams for their children, which is why our Government now provides over $11 billion in services and programmes for Canadian children each year. Building on these initiatives, we know that a strong Canadian response to the challenges raised by this special session of the General Assembly will further chart our way forward.

The federal Government works in full partnership with Canada's provinces and territories in the interests of our nation's children. Together, we have introduced a National Child Benefit, which provides increased

income support directly to low-income families. As of 2001, the Government of Canada has invested $2.4 billion annually in this programme, which we see as one of the most important social advances in our country since the introduction of universal medicare in the 1960s.

Through the Early Childhood Development Agreement reached in 2000 with provincial and territorial Governments, we have begun to build a comprehensive system of services for young children and for their families. The Government of Canada is investing $2.2 billion over five years for enhanced programmes and services to that end.

The well-being of aboriginal children is a fundamental Canadian priority. We are strengthening and expanding the federal Government's early childhood development programmes and services in aboriginal communities across Canada. This includes the successful Aboriginal Head Start programme, which provides a holistic approach to child development and education, ensuring a healthy early development for aboriginal children and contributing to their readiness for school. We also work closely with aboriginal communities and provinces and territories to reduce the incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome among aboriginal newborns, and we are providing support to first nations children with special needs who face learning challenges in school.

These programmes alone reach over 10,000 aboriginal children in Canada — even more when those benefiting from special education supports are included — but there is more we can and will do. Last December, our Government announced an additional investment in those areas of $185 million over two years in order to expand the reach of the programmes and to further help aboriginal children receive the best possible start in life.

On a global level, the alleviation of poverty and its impact on children remains our common cause. Broader and better-delivered debt relief should be pursued vigorously through the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative. We need to take care, however, that the economic development which all countries desire does not degrade the global environment and that good governance prevails to meet social development priorities.

Internationally, we must all work together, in cooperation with UNICEF and other organizations, including civil society and non-governmental organizations, to address these issues. For example, Canada has been a lead donor to programmes that eliminate micronutrients malnutrition. More than 2 billion people in the world suffer from vitamin A, iron and iodine deficiency. The impact is enormous: hundreds of thousands of children die; 250,000 children each year are blinded; and, for millions of children, learning ability is reduced by 15 per cent. Working with partners such as the Micronutrient Initiative and UNICEF, Canada has provided over 1 billion vitamin A capsules to ensure that two-thirds of African children receive vitamin A and immunization services. We have also helped ensure that children in over 40 countries consume salt fortified with iodine. We are committed to building on these successes so that no child suffers from these forms of malnutrition in the coming decade.

Canada is also working to combat the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS on children, their families and communities, particularly in Africa, which has 85 per cent of the world's 10.4 million AIDS orphans, according to UNICEF. In Canada, we have recently quadrupled our development assistance for HIV/AIDS prevention and care programmes in developing countries, representing an investment of $270 million over five years.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada has taken a particular interest in the devastating impact of armed conflict on children. In the past decade, such conflicts have killed more than 2 million boys and girls and deprived millions more of everything that constitutes a normal childhood. Anti-personnel mines also continue to kill or maim thousands of children each year and remain a daily terror in at least 68 countries worldwide.

We have made headway. The Ottawa Treaty on landmines, the Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Winnipeg Conference on War-Affected Children are major milestones marking our way, but there is much further to go.

(*spoke in English*)

Dangers can also lurk for our children outside of conflict zones; they require our vigilance and protection even in societies at peace. The Government

of Canada is unequivocally committed to protecting children from all forms of abuse and exploitation, both domestically and internationally. Canada's laws against child pornography are among the toughest in the world. However, we are not complacent. We are poised to make our laws even tougher through new legislation criminalizing use of the Internet for purposes related to child pornography and the luring of unsuspecting children.

We must keep moving ahead with policies and initiatives that put the security of our children first and which stop their abuse, exploitation and endangerment. This is our job not only as leaders and political decision-makers, but also as parents and adults. It is our responsibility.

These are not easy issues, but should we ever doubt our ability to succeed, I think we could look to Afghanistan as a source of inspiration and newfound hope. If that country and its people, who have suffered such vast oppression and borne so great a burden of poverty, abuse and deprivation — if they, in less than six months of transition, can bring their children — boys and girls — back to school, as they did in March, then surely the broader global community can make major gains in addressing the challenges of poverty, disease and harm to children.

We have before us the largest and youngest generation the world has ever known — more than one third of the world's population. No less than the survival of the planet — the peace and the prosperity in which we all seek to live — depends on the extent of the protection and respect that we accord our children. Of all the issues that we face as a global community, there is none more universal, none more fundamental and none more urgent than this.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Roberto Maroni, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of Italy.

Mr. Maroni (Italy): First of all, I should like to compliment the President on his leadership of this special session of the General Assembly and to endorse the statement made earlier by Spain on behalf of the European Union.

Despite the commitments solemnly proclaimed at the 1990 World Summit for Children and the almost universal acceptance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we should admit today, on the occasion of this session, how little we have done, we should acknowledge the varied challenges that we face, and we should discuss common strategies. It is the duty of our generation — both parents and politicians — to fight against discrimination, against exclusion from education, against the exploitation of children and against the increasing phenomenon of street children.

Within the framework of the commitments signed at the World Education Forum, held at Dakar in 2000, Italy made education a priority for its programmes of international cooperation. Italy is also a member of the high-level working group to implement the Dakar strategies, and it has successfully completed projects to improve its national school systems.

Our commitment to education is complemented by a strong health-care initiative to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, malnutrition and undernourishment, especially among women. Italy has invested considerable financial and human resources in the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, and it is the second largest donor to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. We also intend to focus our efforts on the social aspects of the fight against HIV/AIDS among children.

The eradication of poverty will inevitably reduce the causes of child abandonment and bring children back into the life cycles of society. Over the past 10 years, Italy has directed greater resources towards defending the rights of children and adolescents in developing countries. In the framework of a coordinated and multisector approach, Italy has allocated major voluntary contributions to international organizations that deal with children's issues for cooperation programmes implemented in close coordination with non-governmental organizations, regional authorities and United Nations agencies.

Long-distance support is one of the resources on which Italy intends to focus, allowing better organization and coordination of projects to provide young people with real opportunities to be independent and to develop a spirit of initiative along with the cultural and professional skills that will help them escape dependence on charity.

Italy plays a leading role in the promotion of international initiatives to halt and eradicate trafficking in human beings. At the time of the 1989 adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in New York, Italy was one of the first countries to support the

two Optional Protocols to the Convention. I am pleased to announce to the Assembly that this morning I deposited our instrument of ratification of the two Protocols with the Secretariat.

Last July, my country hosted an international workshop on children in armed conflict, aimed at drafting an agenda of commitments to monitor critical situations and at establishing a global network of experts. We are also committed to creating a permanent group of experts to study the best ways to fight that phenomenon.

There can be no economic growth when young workers are being exploited. Italy was one of the first countries to ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 182, on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. We support fully the ILO's global campaign to raise awareness of the need to end child labour. We have also played a primary role in the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour.

Italy is proud to have hosted the Palermo conference against organized crime in December 2000 and to have been one of the first countries to sign the International Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the two related protocols against smuggling and trafficking in human beings. My Government hopes that the Convention will soon reach the number of ratifications required for its entry into force. In recent years, we have promoted a number of projects, in close cooperation with international agencies and the local authorities of the countries of origin, to fight child trafficking and to guarantee to its victims protection, assistance and reintegration into their families, schools and social systems.

A world fit for children must guarantee, above all, the right to a family, the right to grow up and to develop one's personality in a climate of love and understanding under the care and supervision of one's parents. The family still represents the basic structure for the education of a person, the protection of his or her well-being and the fostering of social unity. We intend to take an integrated approach that addresses financial and fiscal issues, the provision of social services and structures and labour policies. Our actions aim not only to respond to emergency situations but also and above all to promote the well-being of the family unit and that of all its members — first and foremost, children.

A world fit for children means the right to a healthy environment. The shared planning of the urban environment encourages children — especially adolescents — to reappropriate urban spaces and the local cultural heritage, and it makes them a part of the decisions that promote their rights and define their spaces.

A world fit for children means special attention to education — a high-quality education accessible to all. In its childhood policies, Italy also contemplates the relationship between children and the new media, which educators feel is crucial to education policy.

Mr. Balzan (Malta), Vice-President, took the Chair.

A world fit for children means protecting the smallest citizens from danger, particularly exploitation and abuse. Italy's three imperatives — prevention, protection and recovery — commit us to achieve integration and inter-institutional interaction through the creation of local centres to monitor the needs of children and adolescents, through the integration of social health services and through the creation of a protection network.

In conclusion, the participation of children in the decision-making process is essential in order to achieve our goals. In the light of that fact, the presence of so many young girls and boys at the special session underscores our commitment. We are sure to succeed if we manage to understand what children really need and if we learn to listen to what they have to say. That is the first step in our quest to create a better world for everyone — not just today, but also in the future.

The Acting President: I call now on Her Excellency Ms. Hilde Frafjord Johnson, Minister for International Development of Norway.

Ms. Johnson (Norway): I yield the floor to Norway's child delegate, Ms. Heidi Grande.

Ms. Grande (Norway): I am from the privileged North, but also one of the children of the world. I get food every day, I have a bed to sleep in, and I go to school. Those are basic needs that should be met for all children. For many children they are not.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child made a basic change for children. Instead of being perceived as objects or victims, we now have our own rights. It is important that you, the decision-makers, keep those

rights in mind whenever you make a decision that will affect children in any way. Most of the issues you as Governments or lawmakers deal with affect children in one way or another. Remember that.

Children should be your most important partners in your work for children. According to article 12 of the Convention, all children have the right to express their views on all matters that affect them. We might not show up in your offices and tell you what we think you should do. You may have to come to us and ask. I think it will be worth the extra effort, because we represent knowledge and experiences that you do not have. We, the children, are experts on being 8, 12 or 17 years old in the societies of today. Nobody knows better what children actually need. To consult us will make your work more effective and give better results for us. My proposal is that you make children part of your team. It is good to see that so many Governments have included children in their delegations to the special session. I hope that every Government will include children when they now make their national plans of action.

If the goals and plans of action in the draft document are achieved, it could make a big difference to children's lives. Please consult us and make all possible efforts to make it happen.

Ms. Johnson (Norway): What should we do to put children on the agenda? In one sense, nothing. Children are the agenda. Children are at the heart of each and every Millennium Development goal, beginning with the battle against poverty.

In another sense, everything. For our lofty aims will eventually come to nothing unless we uphold and fulfil the rights of, and the promises to, our children, unless we eliminate poverty as a children's disease, unless we provide basic education to those without it, unless we stop millions of children from dying from curable diseases annually, unless we prevent a generation of children from becoming orphaned by HIV/AIDS, and unless we stop the abuse and misuse of children every day.

We committed ourselves to do so at the World Summit for Children in 1990. Since then, progress has been made: 3 million more children survived their fifth birthday in 2002 than did in 1990. But still, nearly 11 million die annually of preventable diseases.

More children than ever are receiving basic education. But still, 120 million children are not in school, more than half of them girls. More international rules are in place to protect vulnerable children. But still, millions are devastated by exploitation, abuse and discrimination. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has become the most ratified human rights convention of all. It puts human dignity at its centre. But still, it is violated every day.

We are now at the final stage of our negotiations. Let me say loudly and clearly: now is the time to stand by our commitments, not to undermine them. Now is the time to strengthen children's rights, not to water them down. Now is the time not only to stick to our promises and obligations but to act on them.

Action: first, children must be at the core of our fight against poverty. That cannot be done without additional resources. Both developed and developing countries have to deliver. We must all invest in children. That is at the heart of the Norwegian Action Plan for Combating Poverty in the South towards 2015. We have committed ourselves to increasing our official development assistance to 1 per cent of our gross domestic product (GDP) by 2005. I urge other rich countries to reach the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of GDP for official development assistance and to direct it to efficient poverty eradication. We need to see the developed countries deliver.

Secondly, we have to set our priorities straight in both the North and the South. More emphasis must be put on basic social services. There is great call for investment in education and health. Education may well provide the single largest exit from poverty. And girls' education is the key to that exit. The immunization of children does not only reduce suffering; it combats poverty and promotes economic growth.

Thirdly, children in distress must be given special attention. Armed conflict poses extreme risks to millions of children, not only the risks of hunger, disease and death but also of displacement, bereavement and traumatizing violations of human rights. We must invest much more in conflict prevention. We must do more to protect civilians in armed conflict. Children must be at the core of our efforts. It is encouraging that the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict has now

entered into force. Let us make the follow-up a reality in order to make a real difference for real children in real conflicts around the world.

The effects on children of the HIV/AIDS pandemic are devastating. We may be facing a nightmarish scenario of 40 million starving, poor orphans by 2010: orphans without education or employment; orphans who will provide excellent recruits for criminal gangs, child soldiers and other forms of exploitation; orphans in need of care and protection. Things have not come to this yet, but urgent attention and action is needed. The battle against HIV/AIDS is also a battle for our children.

Fourthly, although the challenges are daunting, children must never be seen as part of the problem. They are part of the solution. They are our most important asset. They are our partners for the future. They are our future. Not in New York, and not in our countries, should we ever let them down.

The Acting President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I should like to inform members that the report of the Credentials Committee of the special session has been issued as document A/S-27/18. In that connection, an amendment to the draft resolution recommended by the Credentials Committee in paragraph 13 of its report has been issued as document A/S-27/L.2.

The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Paulo Renato Souza, Minister for Education of Brazil.

Mr. Souza (Brazil): Brazil is delighted to see Mr. Han Seung-soo at the helm of this special session.

I would like to pay tribute to Ambassador Patricia Durrant of Jamaica and to the United Nations Children's Fund, through its Executive Director, Carol Bellamy, for their excellent work. I also commend the Secretary-General for the quality of his report "We the children".

The cycle of worldwide conferences dedicated to human rights and social issues that took place in the 1990s began and is now concluding with a meeting dedicated to children. A plan of action to promote the rights of the child and the adolescent must build on the principles, goals and agreements reached in Rio, Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen and Beijing and at their follow-up conferences.

Brazil has made substantial progress towards achieving the 27 goals established in 1990. We have fully achieved nine of those goals, partially achieved eleven others and are collecting the data necessary to evaluate the impact of efforts made to achieve those remaining. Brazil ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and adopted, in July 1990, a broad and effective legal framework: the Statute of the Child and the Adolescent, which in some areas went a step further than the Convention itself. Their implementation has not only meant institutional and administrative changes at all levels, but also made way for the establishment of a complex monitoring and evaluation system that involves the Government and civil society.

With this aim, more than 1,500 Guardianship Councils comprised of five elected members are in place at the local level all over the country. We are promoting awareness campaigns to stimulate the free and universal registration of children after birth.

In the area I am responsible for — education — my country has also achieved significant progress. Approximately 5.5 per cent of our gross domestic product is dedicated to public education. Ninety-seven per cent of Brazilian children from the ages of 7 to 14 are now in school. Greater access to basic education has been a top priority of the current Administration since 1995. The public system is already capable of enrolling all children in the 7-14 age group and of absorbing the majority of children in the 15-17 age group. Four million new children were integrated into the school system during the period 1996 to 1999.

Changes in the allocation and administration of resources have allowed for an increase of 33 per cent in the resources available for basic education. With these resources, we have been able to improve the infrastructure of schools and to provide better quality education. In a period of two and a half years, from December 1997 to June 2000, over 100,000 new teachers were admitted and their average salary was increased by 30 per cent. Resources are being used more efficiently and channelled directly to schools.

Inspired by successful experiences in the cities of Campinas, Brasilia and Ribeirão Preto, the Federal Government decided to expand to the entire country the Bolsa Escola initiative, a scholarship programme by which a monthly stipend is given to low-income mothers to encourage them to keep their children in

school. It involves resources of over $700 million every year. Bolsa Escola is the largest direct-income redistribution programme in Brazil. It provides a 20 per cent increase in the income of the families that benefit from the scholarship. It is also aimed at the empowerment of women by giving them direct access to the family's income and at stimulating them to participate in the education of their children. Since the launching of this programme in February 2001, 9 million children belonging to 5 million families have already been helped. We expect to reach 5.8 million mothers and 11 million children in the near future.

Brazil is fully committed to the progressive elimination of child labour. Besides the actions taken by the Ministries of Justice and Labour, I will mention the programme for the eradication of child labour, aimed at poor and socially vulnerable families with children in the 7-14 age group and supported by the International Labour Organization. The programme also provides a scholarship to maintain children in school. Last year, it reached approximately 400,000 children and adolescents in urban and rural areas alike.

In the past 10 years, we achieved or came close to achieving most of the health-related goals set during the World Summit for Children. Infant and under-5 mortality rates have been significantly reduced. Routine immunization and vaccination campaigns helped in the decline of preventable infections and diseases. Polio was eradicated and deaths from diarrhoea decreased. Iodine deficiency disorders were virtually eliminated. There has been a significant increase in the access of women and adolescent girls to sexual and reproductive health services, but we are aware that these services need to be improved to reduce the still unacceptably high levels of neonatal and maternal mortality and morbidity. Breastfeeding rates for up to six months jumped from 22 per cent in 1975 to 69 per cent in 1999.

As regards the HIV/AIDS epidemic, I will indicate that we are fully committed to dealing with HIV/AIDS, taking into account the human rights dimension and an integrated approach that involves prevention and treatment, including universal and free access to antiretroviral drugs, giving particular attention to the issue of vertical transmission.

I wish to conclude by stressing and commending the fundamental role of Brazilian civil society, including the work of volunteers, and of the private sector, which greatly contributed to the achievement of many of the goals set in 1990. Committed to a new set of goals and objectives to create a better and more loving world for our children, we remain reassured that the solidarity and fraternity that allowed for success in the past will be the guiding principles of the future.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Krystyna Tokarska-Biernacik, Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of Poland.

Mrs. Tokarska-Biernacik (Poland): In this plenary debate, I am honoured to represent the Government of Poland. Let me first stress that we deem it very appropriate for the General Assembly, the best embodiment of the international community there is, to affirm and celebrate the human rights of the most vulnerable in this very city, where, on 11 September last year, human rights were so flagrantly violated by terrorist fanatics.

The extraordinarily high profile given to this special session quite rightly reflects the gravity of the problem before us: making the world fit for children. At the international level, we are trying to build a world more fit for children by creating basic standards for their protection, by exchanging knowledge on best practices and by setting goals for our national policies. I am proud to say that Poland has a strong record on that front.

In 1978, within the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Poland initiated work on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the General Assembly adopted in 1989. A record 192 countries have ratified the Convention, and Poland was among the first to do so. In 2001, Poland signed the Optional Protocols to the Convention, on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. I should mention that two persons who greatly contributed to the birth of the Convention — Professor Adam Łopatka and Professor Maria Łopatkowa — are with us in this Hall today as members of the Polish delegation. I wish to salute them for their efforts.

Polish initiative also led to the adoption, in 2000, of the International Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. That Convention has protocols against trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and against the smuggling of migrants.

Earlier, in 1998, Poland had worked very hard, together with other countries, for the adoption by the International Labour Conference of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and for its follow-up. Those fundamental principles and rights include the effective abolition of child labour. Poland has also ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 138, concerning the minimum age for admission to employment, and is now finalizing its ratification of ILO Convention 182, concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. We in Poland take special pride in our contribution to the adoption and promotion of those international instruments, which are referred to in the draft outcome document of this session (A/S-27/3) as international standards of major importance providing a framework for all actions concerning children and adolescents.

What are Poland's accomplishments and shortcomings 12 years after the World Summit for Children adopted its Declaration and Plan of Action? Starting with our Constitution, Poland's laws comply with the international standards for the protection of children, mothers and families. Since 2000, Poland has had a special Ombudsman for Children who acts as a children's rights watchdog, intervening on behalf of children when their rights or interests have been violated and when regular procedures of rectification have proved inadequate.

Like other countries around the world, we have a mixed record. In 2001, the Polish Government presented the Secretary-General with our national progress report. On the positive side of the ledger, the report lists our reduction of infant mortality by more than 50 per cent and our reduction of mortality among children under 5 by 40 per cent. Maternal mortality in Poland has fallen by more than 65 per cent. Access to primary education is universal. The literacy rate is near 100 per cent, although functional illiteracy exists. Poland has a developed system of maternity protections and of benefits aimed at supporting families in the rearing of children. Various actions have been taken with regard to fertility and family planning. Also, knowledge of human sexuality is part of the school curriculum in Poland. The present Government wants to ensure that such knowledge is complete and is taught by highly qualified teachers. All in all, Poland has generally achieved the goals set at the World Summit for Children.

On the negative side of the ledger are the disparities between Poland's developed cities and its relatively underdeveloped rural areas, which are inhabited by about 30 per cent of its citizens. The social consequences of those disparities have recently been exacerbated by slower economic growth and by the large wave of baby boomers entering the labour market and the resultant growth in unemployment, which now stands at more than 18 per cent. All those factors inevitably have negative impacts on families and children.

Even the best social policy, by itself, will not overcome those disparities in the short run. By pursuing sound macroeconomic policies, the Government is creating the conditions for faster economic growth in the future. The educational reform instituted in 1999 — although it requires certain adjustments — aims to prepare students to function in the current demanding and flexible labour market. New curriculums are turning away from rigid training in narrow specialized fields and towards a broader approach that equips students with business knowledge. Poland's future membership in the European Union will create unprecedented opportunities for swifter economic growth and social development.

Yet, in order to achieve these objectives more efficiently, we need the support of local communities, of churches and of non-governmental organizations. The past decade witnessed an explosion of such organizations in Poland. More than 20 of them are affiliated with this session. At all levels of Government — both national and local — they are regarded as valuable partners. To foster volunteerism among our citizens, the current Government will introduce legislation supporting non-profit organizations that work for the public good. Voluntary organizations strengthen the community fabric. For young people, they provide a positive alternative to various — sometimes criminal — juvenile subcultures. We view them as important allies in combating juvenile delinquency. Incidentally, we believe that the criminal behaviour of juveniles deserves greater attention and a more comprehensive response on the part of international forums, such as this special session.

Yet, despite the mixed record of accomplishments, the Secretary-General is right to say in his end-of-decade review, "We the Children", that

> "... the world has seen ... more progress for children in the decade since the World Summit for Children than in any other period". (*A/S-27/3, para. 36*)

The Secretary-General suggests that momentum has been created for a "decisive shift in national investments to favour the well-being of children" (*para. 47*). As he says, this special session on children should be the juncture at which this important step is taken. We should all wish for such an outcome.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pak Gil Yon, Chairman of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Pak Gil Yon (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): This special session, convened in a new century, is of particular significance with respect to reviewing the implementation of the last decade's goals for the survival, protection and development of children spelled out at the World Summit for Children and to exploring practical ways and means to achieve those goals during the current decade.

The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will strive, together with other delegations, to make the special session an important occasion for laying another milestone in promoting humankind's common cause: the well-being of children.

Under the wise leadership of the respected General Kim Jong Il, the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea carries out its policy of cherishing children by considering children to be the "king of the nation" and by giving top priority to childcare and education on the basis of the human-centred Juche idea. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has adopted its Thesis on Socialist Education, its Law on Public Health and its Law on the Upbringing and Education of Children, and has established a system of free medical care and universal 11-year compulsory free education, thus ensuring that the State is fully responsible for the health and well-being of children and women.

Thanks to the enforcement of government public health and advanced education policies, successes have been registered in implementing our national plan of action during the period under review, and by the early 1990s considerable progress had already been made in achieving the goals for children.

In the second half of the 1990s, successive natural disasters, combined with other external factors, had serious negative consequences for the economic development of the country, presenting great difficulties and challenges to the Government's efforts towards the well-being of children. Nevertheless, the Government has continuously provided social services, such as free education and free medical care. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has recently adopted laws and regulations such as the 1999 Law on Education, and has steadily made better use of existing laws, thus keeping abreast with progress in this area.

On the issue of the well-being and protection of children and women, the Government has consistently attached importance to international collaboration and cooperation, as well. Last year, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and is preparing its second report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has also cooperated closely with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and with other international organizations, non-governmental organizations and donors for the well-being of children.

I take this opportunity to express deep thanks to United Nations agencies and donor countries, non-governmental organizations and other organizations, and especially to Ms. Carol Bellamy, the Executive Director of UNICEF, for their sincere assistance to our endeavours to promote the well-being of children.

The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is of the view that the current session should pay particular attention to the following points. First, an appropriate national policy that ensures the survival, protection, development and participation of children should be created, along with a firm legal system.

Secondly, the strengthening and development of a national economic foundation conducive to the full achievement of the goals for the decade to be adopted at the current special session needs to be ensured. A strong national economy materially ensures the well-being of children.

Thirdly, an international environment needs to be created to help resolve child issues on a sound basis. In line with this, it is necessary to remove the negative impact of globalization, to lift unilateral economic sanctions and blockades against developing countries and to settle conflicts through peaceful dialogue. Reality shows that unilateral economic sanctions and blockades against developing countries and conflicts of all sorts have a severe impact on individual countries and the surrounding regions, as well as on their social and economic development, thereby threatening the right to survival of millions of children.

Finally, financial contributions and international cooperation should be enhanced to help resolve child issues.

Ensuring durable peace on the Korean peninsula today is one of the fundamental prerequisites for resolving child issues in the region. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will do its best to boost cooperation between the North and the South of Korea while rejecting all forms of dependence on outside forces, with a view to fully implementing the historic North-South Joint Declaration, which represents the will and aspiration of the Korean people to realize national reunification based on their own efforts.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, with due attention to achieving new goals for the decade, will direct all its efforts to the lofty work of promoting the well-being of children.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Luisa Durán de Lagos, Chairperson of the delegation of Chile.

Mrs. Durán de Lagos (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me at the outset to express my Government's satisfaction and gratitude at seeing Mr. Han Seung-soo presiding over the special session of the General Assembly on children. My delegation has no doubt that his experience and wisdom will facilitate consensus on an issue of special importance to the future of humanity.

My Government has taken note of the special priority the Secretary-General attaches to the question of children. We are thankful for that dedication, and we extend our thanks to Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, and especially to the Permanent Representative of Jamaica, Patricia Durrant, who presided with enthusiasm and brilliance over the preparatory work for this special session.

The challenge of emerging as a developed and socially integrated nation in the new century requires the inescapable precondition of giving our children and adolescents the cultural, emotional and material conditions that they need for the full development of their capacities.

Chile has embraced that principle and has placed emphasis on the potential and contributions of youth and children rather than on a policy of welfare to satisfy their unmet needs. That approach is the fruit of a long process of experience and evaluation, notably over the past decade.

In 1990, two significant milestones were reached simultaneously in Chile that moved the issue of protecting children and adolescents higher on the public agenda: the return to democracy and the convening of the World Summit for Children. Those events prompted my country to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child that same year. More than a decade later, the most significant advances have taken place within the context of the creation in 1992 of a National Plan for Children, which focused the State's efforts on the fields of health, living conditions, education and the enactment of laws to protect the rights and integrity of children and adolescents.

Thanks to a policy that has combined economic growth with sustained progress in the area of social equity, the levels of poverty and want among children and adolescents were reduced from 50.7 per cent in 1990 to 29.1 per cent in 2000.

With regard to public health, nearly all children under 6 years old have periodic check-ups in the health care network, and some 98 per cent of them are covered under our comprehensive immunization plan.

Through educational reform, Chile has increased enrolment at all educational levels, recording the greatest progress in preschool education, which increased from 20.9 per cent in 1990 to 32.5 per cent in 2000, and in secondary education, which rose from 80.3 per cent in 1990 to 90 per cent in 2000.

In the legislative sphere, some laws have been modified and others have been adopted in order to protect and to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents: some examples are laws on filiation, on

adoption and on the prevention of domestic violence. Nevertheless, inequalities persist — depending on the area in which children live and on the socio-economic status of their families — and are compounded by new problems, such as drug addiction, child prostitution, steadily increasing teenage pregnancy and child labour, which call for coordinated efforts by the State and by civil society.

To confront those problems, the Government has designed a national policy for children and adolescents that is being implemented in a comprehensive plan of action for 2001-2010. That policy, inspired by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, views children as individuals with attributes and rights vis-à-vis the State, the family and society. The key goals of the national policy for children and adolescents are the promotion of rights, the strengthening of the family, the coordination of public policies, comprehensive protection for children and the participation of children and adolescents.

One aspect of the national policy is comprehensive reform of the justice system to ensure the protection of children's rights. Such reform envisages a law to protect the rights of children and adolescents and the creation of a specialized criminal justice system for juvenile offenders. In addition, a family court law will be created that will give judges jurisdiction to try cases involving such issues as child abuse, domestic violence, adoption, filiation and alimony.

With regard to education, proposals include increasing access to high-quality education and creating mechanisms to keep children in school. In that connection, last year a law was promulgated that enables teenage mothers or pregnant teenagers to continue and complete their studies. The free health care services provided in educational establishments will be extended into new specialties. The school health programme will also be expanded to cover secondary school pupils up to 18 years old. At the local level, special priority will be given to community facilities, taking into account the recreational and leisure needs of children and adolescents. New avenues will be explored in the artistic and cultural sphere, such as the experience of youth orchestras and children's orchestras, which are having a positive impact today on children, on their families and on the community environment.

Against that background, Chile today reaffirms its commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to the follow-up mechanisms promoted by the United Nations. Nearly 47 years ago, on the occasion of a solemn meeting on human rights, our poet and Nobel laureate, Gabriela Mistral, sent a message that was read out in this very Hall:

> "I would be happy if our noble effort on behalf of the attainment of human rights were genuinely embraced by all nations of the world. That would be the greatest triumph achieved in our time."

I think her words have lost none of their relevance, especially if we direct them to the millions of children and young people who demand of us a more just world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Ms. Marie-Thérèse Hermange, Chairperson of the delegation of France.

Ms. Hermange (France) (*spoke in French*): The President of the French Republic had long planned to participate personally in this special session on children, in which he has the greatest interest, being convinced that a new wind is blowing here: a wind of generosity and hope for the world's children. The electoral timetable in France did not permit his presence here today. It is as his personal representative in this session's preparatory process that I address the Assembly. On his behalf, I should like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, to Ms. Bellamy and to Miss Durrant for their exemplary actions on behalf of children, including in preparing for this session. In France, preparations for the session have given rise to numerous initiatives, and have produced 100 proposals for a new policy on children, which I had the honour to present to the President of the Republic.

This special session must be used to unify and to consolidate in a common process the paths that emerged from the World Summit for Children in 1990 and from the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. But this session must also give new life to children's policies, and should mark our commitment to redouble our efforts on their behalf.

Redoubling our efforts requires, first of all, that we must reaffirm our philosophy and our approach based on the rights of the child. The implementation of the 20 November 1989 Convention — which is so fundamental that it has been almost universally

ratified — has played a major role during the past decade in mobilizing worldwide efforts on behalf of children. If I had to single out three rights, they would be the right to protection from all forms of violence; the right to education, in particular for girls, because it is one of the keys to progress in the world; and the right to health, in the face of the terrible challenges posed by pandemics such as HIV/AIDS and malaria. In order to reaffirm that philosophy, we would be highly justified in making 20 November an international day of children's rights.

Yet the recognition of those rights must not lead to the premature transformation of children into adults or to confusing such rights with an absence of boundaries: children need to be guided, taught and sponsored by an authority figure during their evolution into adults. In that regard, we are all responsible — parents, educators, families and public institutions. Parents must shoulder their full responsibility in fulfilling their role with respect to children.

But renewing our efforts also means implementing, in concrete ways and with determination, the ambitious legal measures formulated over the past 10 years on the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. France calls for universal ratification of the Convention and of its Optional Protocols relating to two of the worst forms of violence against children — Protocols that my country recently ratified. France is pleased that, under the Secretary-General's authority, a report on violence against children is being prepared and will soon be released. It also welcomes the increased attention that the Security Council has given to the serious problem of children in armed conflict. Consider the facts: 2 million children have been killed in conflicts since 1990, 6 million have been wounded or left disabled, and 10 million have been traumatized by the loss of their parents or by sexual abuse.

Sexual violence against children, child pornography and the criminal use of new technologies such as the Internet in those activities are new challenges that must be addressed. No country or institution is without failings here. The pr[illegible]n of children is an ongoing duty, one that concerns us all. To fulfil that duty, we must ensure that the relevant conventions are effectively implemented and monitor their implementation, inter alia by giving the Committee on the Rights of the Child the resources it needs and by coordinating international on, for example, the fight against child pornography and the sexual exploitation of children.

We must also redouble our efforts to bequeath to our children a clean and sustainable planet. In the perspective of the upcoming Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, which will address issues of environmental protection and the duty of solidarity between generations, do we not have the duty to ensure "inter-generational justice" leading us not only to provide the conditions today in which children can better grow up, free from contamination and environmentally linked illnesses but also to leave to future generations a world that has been protected and a sound ecosystem? In that connection, France recommends increasing children's awareness of those issues. I would also like to recall the wish of the President of the French Republic to establish a world environment organization.

Lastly, and most important, we must redouble our efforts to combat poverty and extreme poverty. If we have failed to fully attain the goals of the 1990 Summit — it must be said clearly and plainly — it is in large part because we have not been able to better combat poverty by allocating sufficient financial and human resources. For our children to live better, we must go further in our fight against poverty, following what was set out at the Millennium Summit and confirmed at the recent Monterrey summit on financing for development — primarily with regard to Africa. Economic and social development, in both developed and extremely poor countries, is critical to improving the lot of children. For proof, I need only cite the difficult and complex issue of child labour. The transition from a domestic economy to a profit-based economy, urbanization, the break up of the family unit and the search for comparative advantage on the world market have shattered the old system and have resulted in actual networks of child exploitation. We must condemn these and fight them with determination, without limiting ourselves to those practices the International Labour Organization has identified as the worst forms of such exploitation.

This must lead us to recognize that the fight against poverty is an essential contribution to improving the lot of children. It necessarily requires greater financial contributions. I wish to recall here the appeal by the President of the French Republic at Monterrey for the industrialized countries to make a greater effort. Action against poverty is crucial, but it

is not sufficient to guarantee respect for children's rights everywhere and at all times. Children are diverse, and their situations are too. But our resolve in combating the violence inflicted on a vulnerable population must be unvarying constant.

France continues to pursue the same dream of seeing spread throughout a world of cultural diversity the ambitious aspiration it chose for itself: liberty, equality and fraternity. Liberty, equality and fraternity first for the most vulnerable: for our children. That, in a way, is what Mr. Kofi Annan and Ms. Carol Bellamy wanted for children at the dawn of the twenty-first century when they organized the special session. We must not disappoint our children and must prove equal to our pledged commitments.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Richard Ryan, Chairman of the delegation of Ireland.

Mr. Ryan (Ireland): I am honoured to address the special session of the General Assembly on behalf of the Government of Ireland. The aim of the special session is to renew and reaffirm the commitment made by the international community in the 1990 World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. Children are our most precious resource. They deserve to be cherished and nurtured. We must show that we take to heart yesterday's message from the Children's Forum. The Irish Government therefore attaches the utmost importance to a successful conclusion of the work of the special session, which, itself, is firmly anchored in the logic of the Millennium Declaration.

At the outset, let me congratulate my colleague and friend, Ambassador Patricia Durrant, for her excellent stewardship of the work of the Preparatory Committee. She and the other members of the Bureau have worked assiduously, and we are therefore confident of a successful outcome.

The end-of-decade report (A/S-27/3) prepared by the Secretary-General and by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "We the Children", sets out clearly the global efforts over the last 10 years to translate the intentions, goals and objectives set out in the 1990 World Declaration and Plan of Action into action on the ground.

The Secretary-General's report clearly demonstrates the progress made over the last 10 years. We can rightly acknowledge the successes: a reduction in mortality among children under 5; high and sustained levels of child immunization in most regions of the world; polio close to extinction; and more children in school than ever before. However, we must also recognize what the Secretary-General's report describes as the "depressing continuation of ills familiar to mankind" (A/S-27/3, para. 48): the continuing unacceptable levels of poverty in many parts of the world and the growing disparities in access to services and wealth, which the report rightly describes as "obscene".

This special session is an opportunity to refocus our objectives and to renew our common commitment to genuine action for all our children. We are challenged collectively to take national and international action and to rededicate ourselves to the children of the world — all the children of the world. The draft outcome document before us for adoption — "A world fit for children" — identifies clearly the challenges before us over the next 10 years.

Ireland has sought to give practical effect to the commitments we undertook in the 1990 World Declaration, not just because children represent over one third of Ireland's population, but because children matter and the Irish Government is committed to our children. This has been translated into increased investment and important developments in legislation and services for children throughout the 1990s, but it is perhaps best demonstrated in the publication in November 2000 of Ireland's first ever comprehensive National Children's Strategy, the vision and goals of which mirror "A world fit for children". It is also the single biggest initiative in progressing our implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The National Children's Strategy of Ireland offers a clear and ambitious vision:

> "An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential."

Listening to and involving children is a key goal of our National Strategy. A national children's Parliament has been established and we have recently passed

legislation to establish an ombudsman for children to promote and protect children's rights and welfare.

The National Strategy is for all Irish children, but it recognizes at the same time that some of our children need extra support. It sets out real commitments to tackling poverty and social exclusion, so that all our children can enjoy the childhood reflected in our vision. There is a strong commitment to supporting children by empowering their families and communities. The National Strategy is therefore being implemented through partnership — a partnership of children, families and local communities supported by the State and the voluntary and private sectors, all of which are stakeholders, each with a distinctive part to play.

New national and local structures have been put in place to underpin implementation. These include a Cabinet Committee for Children, which is chaired by the Prime Minister, and a dedicated Minister for Children. The Minister is supported by a new National Children's Office. These new structures will be used to progress the actions set out in a "A world fit for children".A similar partnership approach has been a feature of the preparatory process and there is a commitment in the outcome document to strengthening it as part of the implementation process. We strongly endorse this.

The Children's Forum has provided a great opportunity for children and young people from around the world to come together to discuss their views and aspirations. For the first time at the United Nations, we have heard children present the outcome of their own discussions. We should aim to expand these opportunities in our own countries, so that children and young people can develop their understanding of civic values in society and grow as responsible citizens, using their talents and abilities to contribute fully to their families, schools and local communities.

At the international level, Ireland supports the practical realization of the goals and objectives envisaged in "A world fit for children" through the funding by Ireland Aid of key interventions by UNICEF in a number of sectors and environments. The scope and scale of UNICEF's operations are such that it has become one of the largest recipients of Ireland Aid's funding, both through our contribution to its core resources and through emergency assistance funding.

Ireland is committed to providing multi-annual funding to UNICEF for 2001-2003. The Government contributed €4.11 million in 2001, which was an increase of over 50 per cent on the previous year. Ireland has also made indicative pledges of €5.52 million in 2002 and €8 million in 2003. This commitment marks a rise of 43 per cent in our contribution to UNICEF in 2001 and further rises of 44 per cent and 43 per cent in 2002 and 2003, respectively. By the end of 2003, core funding from Ireland Aid to UNICEF is expected to be €6.3 million, which is more than triple the €2.54-million level in 2000.

Political will and the commitment to succeed will be the key determinants of success in realizing the goals and objectives set out in "A world fit for children". On behalf of the Government of Ireland, I can say that we are fully committed to meeting these goals and objectives and are confident that, with the necessary collective political will, we can make a real difference in the lives of all children.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Lamuel Stanislaus, Chairman of the delegation of Grenada.

Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada): I begin by quoting the words of the indomitable freedom fighter, President Nelson Mandela, with respect to the centrality of children in the family, in the nation and in the world:

> "We cannot waste our precious children — no, not one, not another day. It is long past time for us to act on their part. I remind you of your own power and obligation to make the world a better place for children."

What simple, yet powerful words calling for action.

Inaction, therefore, is a luxury which this twenty-seventh special session on children can ill afford. In this connection, we can borrow a thought from Dante's Divine Comedy that there is a place in the hall of shame for those who refuse to take a stand in the defence of children. The defence of children's rights is essentially a human right, entrenched in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the two Optional Protocols. The Convention, which came into force in 1990, is the most ratified human rights treaty in history. It affirms the right of children to a life free from abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Today, nearly 12 years after the 1990 World Summit for Children, we have come to review the implementation of the World Declaration on the Survival, Development and Protection of Children in terms of the progress made or the lack thereof during the 1990s. The Secretary-General's report entitled "We the Children" provides the best estimate of what has been achieved and of what remains undone. Based upon national-level reviews from around the world on the global child, the Secretary-General concludes that the world has short-changed children by under-investment, especially in their health, education and protection. Too much abuse, exploitation, poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and disease, especially the catastrophic and deadly HIV/AIDS, still remain the fate of children, so antithetical to the spirit and intent of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

My country's financial constraints notwithstanding, we are pleased to report that Grenada's under-five mortality rate in 2000 was 26 per 1,000 live births, substantially lower than the region's average of 378. The percentage of children immunized with the three needed doses of diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus vaccine was increased from 81 per cent in 1990 to 88 per cent in 1999, better than the regional average of 87 per cent. And, of course, primary education is a must for all children in Grenada, which ensures a very high literacy rate.

In keeping with the purposes of the special session on children, April was designated Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month in Grenada. The Grenada National Coalition on the Rights of the Child, in conjunction with the Global Movement for Children and UNICEF's point person, have been rallying Government leaders, schools, non-governmental organizations, churches, labour movements and the media in support of the "Say yes for children" campaign by placing children at the top of the national agenda. As she closed the month-long programme, Mrs. Marietta Mitchell, the wife of the Prime Minister, said of children:

> "They are our most precious resource — the future of the country — and they deserve a proper environment conducive to their growth and development. Above all, we must listen to children".

I am pleased to report that Mrs. Marietta Mitchell is here with us in the General Assembly Hall.

In the same vein, the Prime Minister, Mr. Keith Mitchell, made himself available to a children's forum for the purpose of answering their questions and receiving their suggestions as to how they can best contribute to the advancement of their country. Later, the Prime Minister launched a youth employment and development project called Imani, which is an African word meaning faith in God, faith in yourself and faith in one another. The Imani project is designed to provide 500 young people between the ages of 17 and 35 with the opportunity to acquire and develop skills, gain job experience, improve self-image and self-esteem, build confidence and develop a positive attitude about themselves and the world of work while receiving a monthly stipend.

The draft outcome document of the special session has been aptly entitled "A world fit for children", which complements the "We the children" plea. That is why the Children's Forum preceding the special session is an innovation that could be the most far-reaching outcome of the session. Only yesterday, during the opening of the special session, we listened to their representatives and learned that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings come forth words of wisdom. We can be childlike without being childish.

From the perspective of parents, children are their reward and their responsibility, their pride and their joy, and the centrepiece of the family. From the perspective of the nation, and indeed the world, children are the trustees of posterity. Therefore, as the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the world. The future of children is the future of the world.

Finally, the ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius said that one should care for one's own children first and extend the same care to the world's children.

I thank the President, Ms. Carol Bellamy and Ambassador Patricia Durrant.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Rashid Alimov, Chairman of the delegation of Tajikistan.

Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan) (*spoke in Russian*): As we review at this special session the progress that has been made since the 1990 World Summit for Children, we are all quite rightly wondering whether we have done everything possible to see to it that all children grow up healthy and with the peace and respect that produce educated children. The assessments we have

heard in this Hall and in the round tables show that the results we have achieved are very mixed. Despite some progress, the problem of the survival, protection and development of children is just as acute today as it was 10 years ago. We cannot attain the goals set out in the new draft plan of action alone: the contribution of the whole community of nations is important — as is the contribution of individual countries — to the noble cause of protecting the rights of each child on Earth.

The delegation of Tajikistan expects that this special session will give new impetus to our collective efforts to provide a better world and a better future for our children. This is crucial, given the existing poverty and inequality, the spread of HIV/AIDS and other dangerous diseases, and the spread of armed conflict and terrorist acts that kill completely innocent people, including defenceless children.

The entire civilized world is still grieving with the people of the United States, who were targeted by the attack committed by international terrorists on 11 September 2001. And this morning, news agencies issued a tragic report that 32 people had died due to a terrorist act in Kaspisk, in the Russian Federation, including 12 children, and that dozens had been injured. The delegation of Tajikistan expresses its profound condolences to the families of the victims and to all Russians. We also grieve for all those who have perished at the hands of terrorists in various parts of the world. In today's interconnected and interdependent world the pain of this loss is a shared pain, irrespective of where a tragedy occurs.

Tajikistan, which at the dawn of its independence experienced a civil war, has confronted terrorism and extremism head-on, and we understand profoundly the consequences that can result from those horrendous phenomena. Fifty-five thousand orphans were produced and schools and children's homes were destroyed, including pre-schools and paediatric medical centres. That is the sad picture of the inter-Tajik conflict, which ended in June 1997 with the signing of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan. Tajik society and its future were dealt a serious blow. Negative trends such as the threefold increase by 1995 of anaemia among children in all age groups, could erase the progress achieved in Tajikistan in the last 70 years in the area of human development.

Despite our real social and economic difficulties, however, Tajikistan has made great progress in attaining the goals of the World Summit for Children and in implementing the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which were, and continue to be, guiding principles for the Government of Tajikistan in its development of priority actions to improve the lot of children. This is attested to by the consistent implementation of a whole set of measures to protect children during the post-conflict peace-building period and during our profound economic transformation. The body coordinating that multi-faceted work is our Commission on the Rights of the Child, set up on the initiative of our President and headed by the Deputy Prime Minister. At the first national conference on the protection of the rights of the child, which took place in 2001, we outlined the main areas of the Commission's work. Its tasks include involving children and adolescents in the taking of decisions that affect their lives.

We welcome the increased cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund and with the Bretton Woods financial institutions. With the support of United Nations agencies and international organizations, we are rehabilitating schools and children's homes and are developing new types of schools and educational establishments. A majority of school-age children are receiving a free education.

The Republic of Tajikistan is one of the Asian States whose socio-economic development will be determined largely by how we resolve the demographic problems caused by the rapid increase in our population. Despite the fact that we are seeing a steady increase in our gross national product (GNP), the disproportionate increase in population has led to a sharp drop in the indicators of per capita GNP over the past 10 years. As a result, more than 80 per cent of our citizens can be categorized as very poor. Within the framework of Tajikistan's poverty reduction strategy, we are adopting measures to alleviate poverty and to provide assistance to poor families in the form of clothes, textbooks, small-business development and microcredit.

My Government places top priority on a far-sighted demographic policy. That is reflected in our demographic development programme, whose central elements are ensuring reproductive health, protecting mothers and children and educating a healthy new generation. We believe that in doing such work, we can

rely on the resources of the United Nations Population Fund, which we see as our main ally in implementing a sensible demographic policy. I should like to note in particular that in recent years, we have made significant progress in reducing our child and maternal mortality rates.

The national programme to fight anaemia has yielded positive results. Given the particular features of the socio-economic development that we are now experiencing in Tajikistan, our social policy's main goal in attempting to improve the lot of children is to overcome the negative trends affecting children's status and to create the conditions necessary for further progress in providing for future generations. In that connection, we intend to continue to focus on protecting children's rights; on providing high-quality, affordable education and health care; on supporting children who live in particularly difficult conditions; and, of particular importance, on expanding assistance to orphans and disabled children. We hope that States, donors and international organizations will continue to help us resolve those and other urgent problems.

We endorse the main long-term goals contained in the draft outcome document of the special session. Among them, I would draw attention to the problem of providing access to proper hygiene and drinking water. Some 1.5 billion people lack access to fresh water, and almost 2.5 billion lack proper sanitation. Each year, 6,000 people die because they have no access to fresh water, and many of them are children. Unless we take robust action, water will soon be sold like oil, and today's adolescents will be dragged into water conflicts. We hope that 2003 — which the General Assembly has proclaimed the International Year of Fresh Water — and the third World Water Forum, to be held in Japan, will be decisive in the search for ways to resolve this burning issue.

The Acting President: I now call on His Eminence Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family of the Holy See.

Cardinal López Trujillo (Holy See) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Holy See wishes to be always faithful to the Lord's special predilection and tender love for children in the recognition and the full respect due to them. They are a marvellous gift of God.

Over the centuries, countless institutions and works on behalf of children have arisen within Christian communities. They have rendered a generous service in the most diverse areas — the family, education and health — with special emphasis on the poorest and neediest. The fight against poverty, which strikes children cruelly and claims so many victims, is crucial.

In addition to violence in its many forms, other problems are proliferating with drastic effects, such as the moral pollution of the environment, which, in a spiritual sense prevents children from breathing pure air. Families and States cannot avoid the requirements of the human ecology. When moral values are trampled on with impunity, when the atmosphere is artificially charged with eroticism, when the meaning of human sexuality is emptied and trivialized and when children are induced to engage in unspeakable lifestyles and behaviour in an alarming climate of permissiveness, the risks of violence grow.

The full recognition of the human dignity of the child and of all children — images of God — from the moment of their conception seems to have been lost, and it must be recovered. The true measure of a society's greatness is the extent to which it recognizes and protects human dignity and human rights and ensures the well-being of all its members, especially children. A healthy society with a genuine human face is one in which everyone recognizes the family as the basic societal unit and as the most important provider for and educator of children.

It is very important to observe the central criterion mentioned several times in the Convention on the Rights of the Child: that the child's best interests must prevail. That enlightening criterion should not be stifled or mocked by unjust laws. The child's best interests are a precious criterion that has its roots in his or her personal dignity: the child is an end, not an instrument, a means or an object.

The process of human development in all its aspects — physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and social — is the result of a synergy between the family and society. Only through effective collaboration between them can the child be protected from all harm, abuse and oppression and be equipped to share in and contribute to the common good of humanity.

The child's best interests require that children have an adequate relationship with the family based on marriage — the cradle and sanctuary of life, a place for

personal growth, affection, solidarity, law and the intergenerational transmission of culture. In the service of children, the international community must, as Pope John Paul II has said, be committed to defending the value of the family and respect for human life from the moment of conception. These are values which belong to the basic grammar of dialogue and coexistence among peoples.

Therefore, the Holy See believes that the rights of children and the rights of the family should be linked. As the fundamental institution for the life of every society, the family must be understood as the covenant whereby a man and a woman establish between themselves a life-long partnership which by its very nature promotes the well-being of the spouses and the procreation and upbringing of children.

The child — all children — in whatever situation or circumstances, should be loved, welcomed, protected and educated with special dedication and tenderness, and all the more when they face great or burdensome limitations and difficulties. Everything must be done to ensure that children can be conceived, born, raised and educated in a family that is capable of offering protection and an example, in a positive and permanent way, as irreplaceable elements of their upbringing. The child must be considered a member of the family so that parents, open to the gift of life according to their well understood responsible parenthood, can carry out their unrenounceable duties and can be aided, not impeded, by society in their mission.

Only when the family fails should society and the State provide children with what they need, hopefully in a family-like environment that offers them hospitality, dedication, respect and tenderness. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, enjoy the same right to social protection, with a view to integral personal development.

My delegation believes that legislation is needed to protect children from all forms of exploitation and abuse, such as incest and paedophilia, and exploitation through labour, slavery, the abominable crimes of prostitution and pornography, kidnapping and the use of children as soldiers and guerrillas, and to prevent them from becoming victims of armed conflicts or of international or unilateral sanctions imposed on certain countries. All these scourges are a scandal and an affront to humanity. These various forms of violence must not go unpunished.

Careful watch should be kept so that adoptions — both national and international, when truly advisable and respectful of the principle of the child's best interests — are made by married couples who give real guarantees of stability, moral solidity, ability to provide assistance and an exemplary nature. That way, children can be brought up properly without their development being obstructed or their personalities being destroyed. For the integral and harmonious development of children, as science itself teaches, it is in their best interest to have both a father and a mother.

My delegation is convinced that the child's best interests are not recognized when, influenced by the myth of overpopulation, population policies are imposed that go against the rights of the family and children.

Children are both the wealth and the hope of the human family. That is why the delegation of the Holy See hopes that the special session of the General Assembly will bear abundant and valuable fruit in ensuring that the children of the whole world will be the springtime of the family and of society.

The President: I now give the floor to Juan Somavía, Director-General of the International Labour Organization.

Mr. Somavía (International Labour Organization): Today, 180 million children went to work in the worst forms of child labour: in dangerous or hazardous work, risking permanent damage to themselves and even death. More than 8 million of those children are victims of modern slavery and of sexual exploitation; they are used and abused in illicit activities and in war. These are far from being the most widespread forms of child labour, but they constitute a particularly vicious exploitation of childhood. Another 66 million children who went to work today were simply too young to be working, even though they were not employed in the worst forms of work. Altogether, some 246 million children went to work today. While we were meeting here, holding our discussions and deciding what to do for children through a declaration, 246 million children were working and not in school.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has now compiled the most comprehensive report ever on child labour. It was launched earlier this week and

sheds new light on these millions of child labourers who, dispersed and powerless, had long remained invisible. Imagine 246 million — a whole population, nearly the size of that of the United States — remaining unseen and unheard simply because they are dispersed throughout the world.

Clearly the report signals a massive problem. But it also speaks of progress. We have gone from denial to acknowledgement to awareness.

Governments and societies have acknowledged the problem. Parliamentarians, employers' and workers' organizations, non-governmental organizations and others are also taking up the fight. Citizens, consumers, school children and college students want to act. Communities are waking up. Many people want to do something about it. The ILO's own work on child labour — research, standard-setting, advocacy and technical assistance — has seen a major expansion. We are now working with 75 countries. ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour has been ratified by around 120 countries in less than three years. We have partnered with the United Nations Children's Fund and with Carol Bellamy and her teams on all of these issues. I also want to take this opportunity to thank Patricia Durrant for everything that is being done in the context of this conference.

So we can say that we are off the starting block, but far from the finishing line. There is urgency to act now, for now — after the ILO report — we know that most child labour occurs in its worst forms. What do we have to do? First, let us attack the root causes. Child labour is not a personal preference. Parents do not want to condemn their children to a life of hardship or to deprive them of a future. They want opportunities for a decent family life. They do not have them today. We need economic policies that can deliver decent work for parents and good education for children. If parents do not have work, we are going to see children going into work. If we have full employment for parents, we are going to see child labour diminish.

Secondly, the fact is that we will not get rid of child labour just through individual development projects and programmes. These are important because they show that it can be done, but stopping child labour starts with moral outrage. It demands personal commitment. It also demands a societal engagement. A society that aims to be free of child labour must have the courage and creativity to do so. It must connect its policies and institutions with the security of children, their families and their communities.

Thirdly, an international community that wants a world free of child labour must make it a priority of all international organizations — I emphasize all international organizations. All policy advice coming from international organizations should be audited with respect to its impact on the worst forms of child labour.

Fourthly, such commitments must be founded on integrated, family-centred strategies that provide escape routes out of poverty and safety nets to deal with crises. I believe that, on the contrary, the present model of globalization contributes to weakening family structures through rising levels of uncertainty and insecurity that affect the weakest most. Let me therefore repeat: We must build such strategies around getting parents into jobs and children into school. Decent work for parents is one of the best guarantees of security and stability for families, communities and societies. It is a key route out of poverty. We must be prepared to make it an explicit goal of national policies and international cooperation.

Fifthly, we can move forward by progressively establishing child-labour-free zones, child-labour-free enterprises, child-labour-free communities, child-labour-free cities, child-labour-free regions and child-labour-free countries. They all come together in the International Labour Organization's time-bound national programmes to eliminate the worst forms of child labour within a given period of time set by each country. We talk a lot about ownership in the international system; this is about each country deciding within itself how long it wants to take to reduce the worst forms of child labour. It is a national decision; it is a decision by each society; but it is a decision that can be taken only within each country and each society. That is the ILO approach. We do not have a single proposal for every country in the world, but we have the instruments to help those countries that would like to advance and to move forward on this issue.

Consequently, I want to formally invite all countries to agree on such a programme. These programmes demand a strong political commitment and national ownership linking action against child labour to poverty alleviation, the provision of basic education to children, and work and income for parents. This does not refer, of course, to what we in the ILO describe as "light work" by children — work that does

not affect their health, integrity or formal education and that, in all of our societies, occurs in the summer or in other moments when children work with parents or engage in other activities.

Finally, countries ready to make this kind of commitment merit support. The international community can provide such support through the policies it shapes and the resources it commits. If we can all agree on such an approach, our chances of making this world fit for children will, I think, be vastly improved. We must never forget that child labour is about adults using and exploiting children for personal profit; it means adults tolerating the abuse of children. Stopping it is the responsibility of adults. This is the true test of inter-generational solidarity. Let us, as adults, live up to our responsibility.

In finishing, let me symbolize what I have just said in the present context. We are in the season in which we are preparing for the World Cup of soccer in Korea and Japan. I believe that, on that occasion, we should all — and we will, within the ILO proposal — give a red card to child labour. That is what I believe we need to do. We need to have the commitment; we need to go outside and to tell the people: "I want to stop it, but not because somebody in the international community came to tell me that I have to stop it; not because somebody is putting it as a conditionality in order to get some resources; but because I want to do it and I do not want to have child labour in my own society." For those who want to work in that direction, the ILO is there to serve them.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Mrs. Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Mrs. Robinson (High Commissioner for Human Rights): In September 1990, world leaders made a solemn commitment to giving high priority to the rights of children, to their survival and to their protection and development. A decade later, they are here again to adopt a new series of goals, mindful that many of the goals and targets adopted at the World Summit for Children have still to be met. There is a need to link with the millennium development goals, some of which go to the heart of issues representatives are here to discuss, including the eradication of poverty and hunger amongst children, universal primary education, reducing child mortality, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and giving the red card to child labour.

This special session is the opportunity to take stock of the progress made. It should serve as a spur to greater political support, increased resources and more dynamic social mobilization to achieve those unmet goals.

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 reflected the international consensus on a new vision of children no longer as mere objects of protection who have needs, but as human beings who enjoy rights. The core idea of the Convention — that children's rights are human rights — is central to the matters being considered at this special session. The Convention, adhered to now by 191 States, is one of the great success stories of multilateral diplomacy and of the human rights movement; but the challenge before us remains significant, and the gaps in implementation painfully obvious.

A human rights approach to the well-being of children requires States to make every effort to eliminate all forms of discrimination against children. Yet discrimination against children, especially girls, is still prevalent around the world and affects their enjoyment of every right. I have vivid memories of my visit to Kabul, last March, which provided a striking example of how development efforts must address gender discrimination if they are to succeed. None of us will ever forget the joy in the faces of the girls who had finally returned to school after years of denial of this most fundamental right.

Just two days ago, the Security Council heard the powerful testimony of three children affected by war. No one is better placed to remind us that the impact of conflict is a profound violation of their rights. We need to do everything we can to ensure their protection and to realize their rights. Next Monday, here in New York, the historic first session of the new Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues will provide a further opportunity for implementing the anti-discrimination agenda adopted at last year's World Conference against Racism as it applies to indigenous children. Many other forms of discrimination must also be addressed, including those suffered by children from poor families and rural and remote areas and those living with disabilities or belonging to minorities.

A rights-based approach to action for children requires children, parents and local communities to be

empowered to participate in the defence of their own rights. Human rights education must therefore become a comprehensive, life-long process, and must start with the reflection of human rights values in the daily lives and experiences of children, including in school curricula.

While every issue under discussion at this special session relates directly to the Convention, a few areas are of particular concern to my Office. As recognized by the special session on HIV/AIDS, respect for human rights is inextricably linked to reducing the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS on children. A rights-based approach, including increased access to medication, is central to mitigating the economic and social impact of the pandemic. The empowerment of adolescent girls and their knowledge of reproductive rights are essential elements in responding effectively to HIV/AIDS.

Children involved with the criminal justice system also have rights. Yet, in too many cases the right of children to be treated in a manner consistent with human dignity, taking into account the child's age and the objective of constructive reintegration in society, is disregarded.

We increasingly recognize that violence against children, in all its forms, is a violation of their rights. My Office has committed itself to support the Secretary-General's study on violence against children requested by the General Assembly. The Commission on Human Rights at its recent session recommended the appointment of an independent expert on this issue.

This special session must yield concrete action towards the full implementation of the rights already recognized by the international community. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is nearly universally ratified. Our task now is to bring these standards home — home to every school, hospital, law court, workplace and family in the world.

I urge the Assembly to keep in mind the human rights framework that already exists for the protection of the rights of children. This includes the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the special rapporteurs on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and on the right to education. The mainstreaming of children's rights has meant that many of the thematic rapporteurs dealing with issues ranging from torture to food report on issues affecting children. The growing community of independent national human rights institutions and the emergence of new coalitions of civil society organizations, including children's non-governmental organizations and networks, offer fresh possibilities for taking forward the struggle for children's rights.

In adopting the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the General Assembly established an agenda for action. By making it the most widely ratified of all human rights treaties, States made a commitment to that agenda. As a lawyer I understand that this is a legally binding commitment by States. But as a parent I understand it more deeply as a morally binding commitment to our children and to our children's children.

Children have brought us their own vision of the commitments the international community should undertake in "A world fit for us", which they worked on during the Children's Forum. Was it not refreshing to hear their voices so often during this special session? I wish the Assembly every success as it works together with children to implement that agenda. They have asked for a world in which their rights and dignity will be respected and their voices heard.

The meeting rose at 8.30 p.m.